Sisters in Spirit
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Introduction

In January 1898, Beatrice Muyororo and Petro Kilekwa were married in a small but festive ceremony on the grounds of the Universities’ Mission to Central Africa’s (UMCA) Mbweni station on the East African archipelago of Zanzibar. The wedding took place in St. Mary’s Chapel, a quaint building with a rounded, beehive-like brick nave and a three-story bell tower. Covered in a fragrant bramble of wisteria, bougainvillea, and honeysuckle vines, perpetually in bloom thanks to the tropical climate, the chapel was but several hundred meters from the rugged white coral coastline—that made it a breathtaking setting for the young couple’s nuptials. Many of the UMCA’s British mission workers likely attended the event, dressed in their stiffly starched and impractically white dresses and suits, as did the many African clerics and congregants who loved the couple and wished them well. Petro’s classmates from the mission’s Kiungani Theological College, as well as friends that Beatrice had known since she was a small child, probably also joined the celebration.

Born into the Yao ethnic group from the Lake Malawi region of Tanzania, Beatrice arrived at the mission in 1881 at the age of two or three as a refugee from the Indian Ocean slave trade. Many of Beatrice’s classmates ended up in the mission this way, kidnapped by slave traders from their inland villages and
marched in neck yokes toward the coast, clinging tightly to their mothers’ hands until separated by the whims of traders or by death. Bound for plantations along the East African coast or for servitude further afield in Arabia, India, or Oman, Beatrice and eventually hundreds of other men and women in her same situation were intercepted by the British navy and entrusted to the care of the UMCA. The UMCA was a British Anglican mission founded by abolitionists to work among refugees from the Indian Ocean slave trade. The mission was an outgrowth of a revival movement within the Church of England; its founders were determined to recreate the church abroad, and they established stations and schools on Zanzibar to train their new dependents as evangelists.

Missionaries placed Beatrice on the mission’s rural station at the Mbweni shamba (farm) several miles from Zanzibar’s Stone Town, where she attended the Mbweni Girls’ School and lived in its dormitory under the ever-watchful eyes of a British “lady” missionary. She was from the earliest accounts a star pupil: by thirteen or fourteen, Beatrice was reportedly “very good tempered, and always had a smile on her face.” British missionaries regarded her as a success story, praising her religious spirit, her industriousness, and her domestic skills. Beatrice showed some promise as a teacher and, after leading small lessons for the younger girls at Mbweni, was promoted in 1893 to the role of pupil-teacher. At first, a report on Beatrice’s career noted, she seemed to find “the new work very trying, and did not like to assert her authority.” “I do not think she has ever been very successful in keeping a large number of children in order,” the missionary continued, “but she has constantly used her influence with individual children when naughty, and by private talks made them see reason, and helped them to do better.” Indeed, on balance it seems that Beatrice was sufficiently prepared to assume her role as the wife of a traveling preacher when she married Petro in January 1898. After their wedding, mission administrators sent Beatrice and Petro to Masasi, a UMCA diocese in southwest Tanzania, to work as evangelists.

When the Kilekwas moved to Masasi, Beatrice brought with her a wide complement of wedding gifts, including “plates, cups, mugs, a jug, teapot, spoons, ladle, enameled basin and saucepan, some print for a dress, and some colored handkerchiefs,” which were provided with the hope that her daily performance of simple domestic tasks would transmit Christian values to neighbors and onlookers. These accoutrements of a proper, civilized Christian life were not the only, nor the most important, evangelical tools that Beatrice brought with her from Mbweni, however. Rather, the personal and spiritual relationships that Beatrice had cultivated at
FIGURE 1. Reverend Petro Kilekwa, his wife Beatrice, and their three boys.
Mbweni were templates for new relationships she would forge with students, protégées, neighbors, and new inquirers. These relationships not only served as Beatrice's evangelical tools, but they also were fundamental to the consolidation of a diverse, multigenerational network of African UMCA congregants that spread from Zanzibar to the mainland of Tanzania and Malawi between 1860 and 1970. The community that these ties produced and maintained was one that existed in the interior lives of the community's members, and can best be understood as an "affective spiritual community."

I developed the concept of the "affective spiritual community" to describe and better understand communities produced and sustained by a circuit of emotional feeling and spiritual connection. Women such as Beatrice and her colleagues, as well as the network and broader community they produced and of which they were a part, can both be understood as an affective spiritual community. In this book, I explore the process by which African adherents used a sophisticated evangelical repertoire—a shared emotional and spiritual subjectivity; daily, embodied performance of a set of commonly held, though always negotiated, values; and constant movement between mission stations—to build community. The UMCA's female lay evangelists built a unified community between 1860 and 1970, a period that stretches from the days of some of the earliest Western outposts in East Africa, across the colonial period, to the earliest days of Tanzania's independence, and across unconnected lands. I examine the construction, the content, and the resilience of the ties they forged, and follow the relationships as they radiated out from Zanzibar, throughout the Tanzanian mainland, and across generations.

Beatrice's personal life and career, and in particular her moves in the years after leaving Mbweni, elucidate the ways in which the unique affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA's "sisters in spirit" produced and sustained an encompassing, multigenerational spiritual community. At Masasi the Kilekwas found a flourishing mission center, which was run largely by other African Christians trained at the UMCA's schools on Zanzibar. Settled by a contingent of British UMCA preachers and freed slave adherents late in 1876, the Christian presence in the area grew quickly. In 1898 the four-station complex that included Masasi, Miwa, Chiwata, and Mwiti boasted a total of 1,412 adherents. In the same year there were eleven schools scattered over the district, with 489 students enrolled. As Beatrice's missionary "mother" had hoped, one of those eleven schools was in fact exclusively for girls.

The girls' day school at Masasi was run by Rose Muriezai, who was the wife of the African priest Barnabas Mtaula and was one of Beatrice's dearest friends from
MAP 1. Select UMCA mission stations and points of interest with inset showing area of detail.
MAP 2. Significant UMCA sites on Zanzibar and the adjacent East African coast.
Mbweni. Mbweni’s British “lady” workers had praised Rose as one of the “best and most useful pupil-teachers,” a “bright, clever girl, with deep religious principles, and . . . a real missionary spirit.” In this they made a good pair: not only had the women always been “great friends,” but they also both looked “upon teaching as the great object of their lives,” which was a trait missionaries believed would “be the means of leading others to Christianity” once stationed together. This, of course, was the pair’s essential task as Christian teachers: educating Rose’s fifty-two female pupils was the key component, UMCA adherents and workers believed, in creating a “race of intellectual Christians.” By “race,” British missionaries were referring to the nineteenth-century sense of the word as a civilization bound and defined by a shared set of cultural values, rather than as a discrete and immutable category defined by geographical origin or heredity, as it is regarded today. Beatrice and Rose would have approached their work with Masasi’s young women with this concept in mind, assisting in the development, expansion, and consolidation of a new Christian civilization (or “race”) in East Africa based on values they absorbed while at Mbweni.

The strong friendship Rose and Beatrice forged at Mbweni was based on the time they spent together as pupil-teachers, a sense they were set apart in their engagement in a common intellectual and religious endeavor, and their shared religious beliefs. They were both also members of the Guild of the Good Shepherd, the UMCA’s professional development organization for female teachers. The guild, like the UMCA’s theology more generally, encouraged members to “feel the power and help of mutual intercession and of prayer,” and promoted special ritual and devotional practices as a means of instilling and sustaining a spiritual and a sensual or embodied connection between teachers, and between themselves and their students.

The affective and spiritual bonds Rose and Beatrice forged at Mbweni were also undoubtedly strengthened by the situation at Masasi. It is true that the UMCA presence in Masasi was relatively strong and the number of adherents grew every year, but as preachers, teachers, and community leaders, the Zanzibar-trained couples were distinguished from their followers by virtue of their educations and positions within the church. Further, they were not “of” the people they were brought in to recruit, lead, and serve. Though Barnaba Mtaula was from the area (the son of a local chief) and Petro Kilekwa had spent about a year in Masasi in 1896, neither Rose nor Beatrice was familiar with the land or its people. Cultural customs and language barriers complicated their immediate integration into the community. Since they
did not speak the local language, they were left to communicate with each other in English or Kiswahili (neither of which was a native tongue) and with their followers either through an interpreter or silently, through the embodied performance of daily rituals. Rose and Beatrice’s domestic routines—which included a particular wardrobe and style of dress, a favored floor plan for the house and compound, very precise laundry and cooking methods, and theories about child-rearing, for example—immediately marked them to passersby as Christians. These quotidian acts of civilized or “practical” Christianity, as historian Kenda Mutongi has called it, set them quite apart from their “heathen” neighbors and left them with an often overwhelming sense of isolation. There was also outright resistance to the church’s work, and to its agents. For example, in 1905 an uprising against the mission caused Rose and her scholars to flee the mission compound. She recalled working furiously to continue the students’ Christian learning while in exile. Of her attempts to hold the intellectual and spiritual community together in the face of external threat, Rose wrote, “We are trying to keep our scholars together,” despite having “no books here, but we teach them what we can remember of the scriptures, and we make them write with a stick on the ground.”

In this environment, far from the church’s civilizational and spiritual center at Zanzibar, bonds with old friends, the presence of fellow believers, and proximity to those with whom the “native” evangelists shared cultural and religious practices were a comfort and a source of strength. Rose and Beatrice invested in relationships with other Zanzibar-trained Christian couples living near them, and they maintained ties with both their former home at Zanzibar and their friends in other parts of the mission. In this way, they engaged in the process of weaving together a spiritual community, one that crosscut and superseded other affinities. Their marriages, kinships, and friendships breached ethnic divides and bridged the wide geographical spaces of the mission’s lands, all in the service of producing a “race of intellectual Christians.”

Evangelists’ affective and spiritual connections undergirded the expansion of the burgeoning “race” or civilization. When the Kilekwas left Masasi in 1899 for Likoma, an island in Lake Malawi, for example, they brought news of the Mtaulas and the Majaliwa clan with them, as well as gossip from their recent tenure at Zanzibar. While stationed at Mtonya they found Eustace Malisawa and Augustine Ambali and their wives Amy and Mabel, all of whom were Zanzibar-trained refugees from disparate parts of eastern Africa. These friendships sustained them, and reinforced the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional connections that united
them. After several years near Lake Malawi, the pair departed for a six-month leave in Zanzibar; the bonds they had formed at Mbweni years before endured, pulling them home. Beatrice looked forward to seeing her friends and their missionary “Mother” Caroline Thackeray, and she in turn was so anxious to see Beatrice and the Kilekwas’ young children that she personally paid for their journey.17 Petro recalled their return to Mbweni as “everything we could wish for. In truth we were at our home.”18

FIGURE 2. Elderly returned Mbweni schoolgirls. From left: Agnes, Kate, Mary, Emily, and Ester.
Connections like these among Rose, Beatrice, Amy Malisawa, and Mabel Ambali, and their friends and adoptive kin at Zanzibar, extended throughout the mission. The network of UMCA women knit together a larger affective spiritual community through their daily performance of a set of commonly held values; through a shared emotional and spiritual subjectivity; through their inherent mobility and constant movement between stations; and through the extension of new personal and spiritual connections. This community spread from Zanzibar to the mainland of Tanzania and Malawi, incorporated many ethnolinguistic groups, and encompassed several generations.

Efforts to build an affective spiritual community took place against a backdrop of the campaign to end the slave trade, the transformation of the East Africa economy, widespread Christian evangelism, and the consolidation of colonial rule. Individual congregants pursued opportunities for enhanced security, professional careers, and religious journeys alongside the broader changes happening around them, and engaged with these developments in patchy, uneven, and gendered ways. The UMCA was in many ways like other, better-known mission organizations, such as the London Missionary Society (LMS) or Church Missionary Society (CMS), and shared with the CMS mission at Freretown and the LMS mission in Sierra Leone a particular focus on ex-slaves and refugees from the slave trade. These similarities give the trends identified here broader applicability. This denomination’s unique theology, the demographics of its adherents, and this work’s focus on affective relationships, on the other hand, offer a new set of understandings for the history of religion and Christian missions in Africa, the creation of ethnicities, and the development of cultural nationalisms.

While resonating with other histories, this study offers an exceptional lens into the way the UMCA’s particular theology and the social circumstances of adherents’ lives combined to produce intimate, affective spiritual relationships between female lay evangelists that united the church across ethnic and generational boundaries. These understandings come through a focus on the lives, work, and personal relationships of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit. They are examined in a series of vignettes and a set of historical snapshots of the lives of the UMCA’s female lay evangelists, stories that reveal these women at work and at home as individuals and within the context of broader networks. The intimate scale of this study was intentional, for “thick description and studies of local processes can contain clues to large causation.” The voices of individual African women provide access to the interior lives and intellectual contributions of female actors. They also shed
light on arguments about the development of some of the grander narratives of intellectual and political change in the long twentieth century—for example, on debates about the development of racial thought, the power of the unseen world to create political change, the articulation of national/ethnic boundaries, and the rise of cultural nationalisms.

**Background and Scope**

The men and women of the British UMCA were in East Africa specifically to work with Africans like Beatrice, all of whom were refugees from the Indian Ocean slave trade. These British missionaries were part of a broader trend among mid-nineteenth-century evangelicals, who spread out across the continent to work with ex-slaves and refugees from the illegal yet ongoing slave trades. Founders of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) mission at Freretown, Kenya, and the London Missionary Society (LMS) mission to Sierra Leone, as well as missions in southern Africa, also created missions explicitly to work with freed slaves. Both the LMS and the CMS had stations in what is today Tanzania by 1885. The French Holy Ghost Fathers began their work in Zanzibar with freed slaves but moved relatively quickly to Bagamoyo, where the remnants of their work can still be seen today. The White Fathers, members of a French society devoted to work in Africa, began work in 1879. Mission work expanded after German conquest. The Holy Ghost Fathers and the White Fathers expanded their work into the interior, whereas the CMS moved largely to Uganda and the LMS handed their stations over to the Moravians and withdrew. Several German missions quickly filled the void, including Roman Catholics, Benedictines, Lutherans, and Calvinists, all split among different mission organizations. While the missions represented a wide range of denominations and theological approaches to what they called “conversion,” they generally employed similar approaches to evangelism: they built schools and trained catechists, and encouraged believers to abandon old beliefs and practices.

What distinguished the UMCA from the other mission organizations setting up shop in East Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century was their theology. The founders of the UMCA were sympathetic to the Oxford Movement, a reform movement within the Church of England that sought to address the Church’s failings through a revival of the Church abroad. These Tractarian reformers (so called for a series of tracts published in Oxford and further afield announcing their philosophy
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and doctrine) hoped to cultivate among their new adherents a “Native Clergy.” This group included ordained African men and their trained wives who acted as partners or “helpmeets” in evangelism; UMCA clergy hoped that the new adherents would lead the church in Africa and take responsibility for growing its membership. In fact, the British missionaries drew parallels between the UMCA’s “Native Church” and the Israelites’ reestablishment of Zion after Jerusalem’s destruction. Similar to God’s “chosen people,” the freed slaves who had found redemption and salvation in the teachings of the UMCA would constitute the core of the new church. African clerics and their helpmeets would spread the news of Christ through evangelization and proselytization, performance of faith, and the quotidian work of Christian living.

As UMCA missionaries envisioned it, Africans from throughout the mainland would flock to this new Zion, ethnic distinctions would be eliminated, and African Christians would unite into a single spiritual community. As it had been in Isaiah’s prophesies, missionaries and adherents alike imagined that they would help grow an East African “nation of worshippers of the true God of all peoples and tongues.”21 Because of their faith that Christian women alone were responsible for engendering—both biologically and ideologically—the spiritual community, church officials placed the majority of the evangelical burden on these generations of female adherents. Between 1865 and the 1960s, missionaries and African church leaders attended assiduously to the academic, cultural, religious, and moral educations of the UMCA’s African women, and as a result of these attentions, UMCA-educated women came to embody the principles, practices, and ethos of the mission’s particular brand of modernizing Christianity.

The group of women I term “sisters in spirit,” and whom I follow in their pursuit of spiritual communion, does not include all of the UMCA’s female adherents. Rather, I am concerned only with the subset of the mission’s congregants who, through their daily performance of a certain set of values, evangelized to new believers on the frontiers of the mission. These women did so generally in three different ways. First, there were women like Rose and Beatrice, women who were trained as schoolteachers and clerics’ wives to formally assist the church in its evangelical endeavors. They were not trained in theological colleges like their husbands, nor were they ordained clerics (the UMCA did not include women in the official church scaffolding), but they were an absolutely fundamental component of the mission’s evangelical strategy. Second, I also follow the stories of women who were not trained as teachers or clerics’ wives, but who otherwise assumed roles that were acknowledged by the church as part of the mission’s official evangelical campaign.
This second group included educated women such as nurses, nuns, Sunday school leaders, and heads of Mothers’ Union chapters, women who assumed positions that were widely recognized as educative, organizational, or instructive. Finally, women who considered themselves to be UMCA congregants and were educated in schools run by the UMCA, but did not have professional, official, or even often acknowledged roles within the church’s evangelical structure, also fall within the moniker “sisters in spirit.” Taken together, these women can productively be thought of in a manner similar to Feierman’s “peasant intellectuals” in that they assumed social positions of mediation or translation; they were individuals who did work or in particular moments engaged in activities that were absolutely vital to the mission’s domestic and quotidian evangelical efforts, and consequently to the spread of the church’s ethos through congregations and across generations.

Whether or not all of these women saw themselves as a group set apart (although there is reason to believe that many of them did), a collective affective subjectivity did bind them together, and it allowed them to advance a network of believers through space and time. Orphaned refugees raised as siblings in the mission’s dormitories on Zanzibar, for example, maintained intimate emotional and spiritual bonds after moving to disparate stations on the mainland with their husbands; as they knelt daily to pray, as they sewed dresses and embroidered vestments just as the missionaries taught them, and as they traveled great distances to maintain schoolgirl friendships, they continued to imbue a diverse spiritual community with meaning. Women like Beatrice and Rose claimed that even while separated by hundreds of miles, kneeling every day at the same time to recite the Lord’s Prayer or to meditate upon the quarterly Thanksgivings and Intercessions offered by the UMCA Prayer Union allowed them to feel close to home. To be sure, their membership in this spiritual community was as salient as others’ belief in their own ethnicity or race. Bound together through intimate relationships of affective spirituality, the “series of nested circles” that constituted the UMCA originated in the private domain of the intellectually and spiritually formative spaces of Mbweni and the performative and constructive spaces of the Christian home. The network extended to the social realms of congregations, to formal and informal women’s organizations, to extended kin and social networks, and finally to the heart of the public sphere.

The UMCA’s sisters in spirit used the emotional ties of affective spirituality as a tool to extend the reach of their community. They established sewing circles and mothers’ unions to teach inquiring women how to raise Christian children; they
formed intimate relationships with “heathen” foster daughters and with schoolgirls who showed dedication and promise; and they performed the daily acts of Christian living—such as laundry, cookery, fashion, and house design and appointment—for curious passersby and neighbors. Their extroverted performances and attempts to maintain the relationships forged in the church constitute a phenomenon akin to what Benedict Anderson has described as the modal journey of the religious pilgrimage. Sacred capitals came to have meaning only when the constant flow of religious pilgrims from otherwise distant and unrelated locals moved through areas such as Rome, Mecca, or Benares—or, in this case, Zanzibar. The unification of people of disparate geographical and cultural backgrounds in a place like Mecca was incomprehensible “without an idea of their community in some form. The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: ‘Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am uttering, even though we cannot talk to one another? There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: ‘Because we . . . are Muslims.’” And so, too, for the UMCA and its mainland communities, the idea of a community comprising Makua, Bonde, Makonde, or Oromo, freed slaves and mainlanders, sons and daughters of local big men and some of East Africa’s most marginal, was inconceivable without the idea of a united spiritual community. The reality of imagined religious communities—which were not just imagined but also “actually existing social contracts”—depended profoundly on these “countless, ceaseless travels” of the religious adepts, such as the Kilekwas, Mtaulas, Majaliwas, and their many colleagues.

Affective Spirituality

A host of recent work on affect in Africa illustrates that engaging affect with knowledge and transmissions, ways of knowing through embodied being, and gendered subjectivities with the senses allows us to tell fundamentally new stories about religious ideas, political change, and intellectual history. Being attentive to affect as an analytical category and as an archive is not the same as telling the history of a single emotion. Rather, it signifies a field wider than “emotions,” for it includes “feelings, emotions, moods, sensations, and the like.” If affects are similar to the contagious nature of a yawn, a smile, or a blush, we can productively imagine certain aspects of the lives of the sisters in spirit as being similarly contagious, productive, and constitutive of an affective spiritual community. This term, as I
employ it here, builds on a much older definition of “affective spirituality” as an embodied experience of Christ’s passion to suggest instead a circuit of emotional feeling and spiritual connection among individuals within a faith community.

In its traditional usage, the term “affective spirituality” indicates a form of Christian piety centered on the “compassionate devotion to the suffering of Christ.” The Medieval Church was particularly vigorous in its promotion of this form of devotion, employing a wide range of evangelical methods to promote a “widening of the contemplative net, calling more and more of its children to participation in the compelling experience of Jesus’ suffering.” During this period, sermons from the pulpit, exhortations from a dais in the marketplace, and treatises or pamphlets read in one’s own parlor became increasingly concerned with Christ’s suffering, eliciting in many Western Christians highly emotional responses to His torment and misery. For many early modern Christians in the West, the imagery of Christ’s suffering called forth within the faithful certain feelings and bodily responses—uniting them, for example, in a “paroxysm of grief”—changing them inwardly and outwardly, and uniting them in a shared community of feeling.

This shared community of feeling among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Western Christians is what historian Barbara Rosenwein has termed an “emotional community.” Emotional communities are, Rosenwein writes, “precisely the same as social communities—families, neighborhoods, parliaments, guilds, monasteries, parish church memberships.” Each emotional community has its own “system of feeling,” a particular way the community and the individuals within it “define and assess [what is] valuable or harmful to them”; how they evaluate others’ emotions; the “nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.” Attention to such communities as they existed in the past—to the embodied response to the Passion, for example, or to the expression and management of singular feelings such as love, fear, anger, jealousy, honor, or passion—allows scholars to better understand political relationships, relationships of the living to the spiritual world, community-building processes, and many other forms of historical change.

The network of discontiguous UMCA congregations that spread throughout Zanzibar and the adjacent mainland between 1860 and the 1960s can also usefully be thought of as an emotional community, one bound together by networks of affective spirituality. These networks were built in part on something resembling the medieval understanding of adherents’ embodied, sensuous, emotive, and heartfelt
devotions toward Christ through the Passion. In the context of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century East African UMCA communities, the term “affective spirituality” also refers to the way in which affect and affective relationships and performances gave shape to the UMCA community across space and time. The affective and emotional dimensions of this community were rooted in missionaries’ Tractarianism, which emphasized slow revelations of the Gospel through daily practice, and a preference for the teachable disposition of small children. The UMCA's Tractarian inheritance also taught that the way of knowing the truth was not merely intellectual—it was embodied and felt rather than reasoned; practiced and experienced rather than taught. More measured than their physically effusive forebears and disinclined toward lavish sentimentalism, Tractarians did, however, emphasize the relationship between mysticism and ritualism expressed by the ancient church fathers, and they valued the importance of an embodied, emotional spirituality. To be sure, Africans have long engaged the affective and the spiritual, and there has been great attention paid to the embodied spiritual practices of Africans. Spirit cleansings and other rituals have long been part of Africans’ ecstatic experience. Rather than a charismatic leader inspiring deep faith (or fear) in the ancestors’ return, or embodied spirituality serving as an expression of other concerns, individual UMCA sisters in spirit cultivated deep and resonant relationships among themselves and within the community. The lives of the UMCA's sisters in spirit illustrate the development of the affective networks and circuitry that made this community possible.

Once the first generations of African adherents began to proselytize, similar bonds grew up between African evangelists and adherents on the mainland, and between “native” teachers and their protégées throughout the mission. These intimate spiritual relationships manifested themselves in many ways. For example, in exile from lifelong friends, fictive and actual kin, and their missionary “mothers,” and often isolated from other Christians, female evangelists like Rose and Beatrice felt homesick, isolated, bored, and nostalgic in their new homes. Rather than retreat from these emotions when they experienced them, many succumbed. To mitigate their feelings, they invested in personal relationships with congregants and inquirers through teaching associations, groups for clerics’ wives, and in the fundamental model of the teacher-disciple. In so doing, the UMCA’s female evangelists transformed homesickness, nostalgia, and alienation into powerful evangelical tools, which both sustained and extended the UMCA's community of affective spirituality.
As with all moral communities, the UMCA was an arena of constant debate. The affective dimensions of the lives of women without “official” evangelical positions in the church shed light on the different pathways toward shifting, controlling, or manipulating virtue and identity. For example, women living on the Mbweni shamba in the 1920s debated the acceptability of particular forms of love, romance, sex, and marriage. A series of abortion scandals, and the events and relationships that produced those pregnancies and framed them as debate-worthy, reveal African congregants’ views on the nature of racial and ethnic thought, and of accepted and acceptable behavior within the moral community. Individuals struggled to define the collective essence of an institution or group, the moral economy in which they lived. On a daily basis, believers sought to define the spiritual and cultural contours of the community—on the one hand through chastity and self-sacrifice, and on the other through romantic love, secrecy, and the particular use of language. UMCA congregants’ shared consciousness and common devotional practices were unifying elements, actively tying together their community of believers. Affect, then, was a central component of UMCA congregants’ spiritual lives, and the ways in which they transmitted their cultural and civilizational values to new inquirers living on the frontiers of the mission. Taken together, then, in the context of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century African mission communities, the term “affective spirituality” describes the way a shared emotional and spiritual subjectivity was produced.

Affecting Histories of Mission

I was initially drawn to the UMCA as a subject of study by the mission’s connections to the development of anticolonial nationalism and national identity in Tanzania, not by an interest in affect as an analytical category. Indeed, the UMCA was known for its important role in Tanzanian history; the African men who graduated from the mission’s Kiungani Theological College (later Minaki) were central to the development of anticolonial nationalism and national identity in Tanzania. Yet, as scholars lament, history says little about the role the mission’s women played in these same processes. The few details my early reading offered about the lives of UMCA women, however, were tantalizing. In particular, I was intrigued by the fact that the wives of the first generations of the UMCA’s African clergy all attended the mission’s Mbweni Girls’ School. Theological students made an explicit point...
of searching for wives at Mbweni, even going so far as to ask missionaries to play matchmaker when they alone were not successful in their pursuits. Clerics from the mainland sent their girlfriends and fiancées to Mbweni for training because, as one missionary recalled of a conversation with two Kiungani graduates, “they did not want wives only to cook for them—they wanted wives who were educated, who were able to enter into their own ideas and aims and interests.” What was going on at Mbweni that was so special, I wondered, and what were the girls’ “own ideas and interests”? In what ways did UMCA-trained women contribute to anticolonial nationalism and to the development of national identity in Tanzania, if any? Beyond that, in what ways could focusing on the lives, work, and relationships of the UMCA’s women tell new stories about the UMCA, and offer new understandings about Tanzanian history, about the history of Christianity in Africa, and about some of the broader narratives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?

The same issues that constrain historians of women and gender working across Africa, and in other parts of the world, also shaped my early attempts to write a history through the eyes of the UMCA’s female adherents: namely, the relative paucity of written sources by or about women. To be sure, much has been accomplished in terms of innovative strategies and methodological approaches in women’s and gender history, and scholars are greatly indebted to the pioneering work of historians of women and gender, but the accepted stories of the spread of Christianity and the development of communities in the colonial world remain male-dominated. Indeed, colonial and national histories generally have tended to make the political actions and intellectual histories of women invisible and to “disappear” their contributions. This lacuna is in large part a product of the available sources.

Sources from the precolonial and colonial eras are a product of the past in two different ways. On their most basic level, they are the ephemera of specific events, perspectives, and processes. On a deeper level, however, precolonial- and colonial-era documents, and the archives from which they come, derive their very shape and nature from the taxonomies that governed missionary and scientific exploration and colonial rule. Missionaries and colonial officials “knew” the world around them in particular ways—ways that had much to do with religion, with civilizational hierarchies, and with patriarchy. These ways of knowing the world shaped how documents were produced, what they contained, and how they traveled through the bureaucratic apparatus. As such, Ann Laura Stoler argues, colonial archival documents are also “active, generative substances with histories,
documents with itineraries of their own.” Written documents, and the archives in which they reside, allow governments—and also missionary organizations—to carry out their projects of routinization, legibility, and control. Archives and documents also produce—or, more precisely, allow scholars to produce—histories with particular shapes and concerns.

Sources produced by the UMCA’s sisters in spirit or those that speak directly to their lives, and academic histories about these women or women like them in other contexts, thus do not exist in the same way they do for their male counterparts. The UMCA had a unique interest in women’s lives and work and was perhaps more attuned to the goings-on of their female congregants than other missionary enterprises. Female congregants also sometimes wrote about their experiences, but those contributions were often edited or otherwise mediated by UMCA missionaries. In general, however, the extant records were composed by and reflect the concerns of the organization’s British male leadership and by male African clerics.

Moreover, it is to the so-called “national” archives, which postcolonial governments inherited from the colonial state, and the archives of missionary organizations, to which Africanists and others first turn when writing about colonies or specific churches. These archives are, however, deeply affected by the concerns and frailties of postcolonial governments. Multiple, abrupt changes in state power, economic constraints, and deliberate attempts to obscure past events have damaged the archives, as have the postcolonial governments’ relative lack of concern with categorization, classification, and preservation. It is not only documents produced after independence, or other records pertinent to the postcolonial period, that suffer. Just as the Tanzania National Archives (TNA) contains few accessible materials relating to the origins of ujamaa ideology or postcolonial foreign relations, the number of UMCA documents that are tangible and accessible by researchers are markedly fewer than the listing guides suggest. Years of underfunding and neglect meant that as I began my research into the lives of the UMCA’s female lay evangelists, request after request for files that John Iliffe, Anne-Marie Stoner-Eby, and Justin Willis had once used in their work on the UMCA went unfulfilled.49

As many scholars of Africa and of women are left to do, I began to explore the “shadow archives” of the British presence in Tanzania, and had serendipitous finds in several “tin trunk archives.” Diaries of British nuns helped to flesh out stories about young African probationers, suggesting the ways in which emotions such as fear and discontent, striving and aspiration shaped their decisions for a celibate life. Love letters an African Anglican priest wrote to his fiancée, which I found tucked
in a glass-fronted cabinet in a small library outside of Dar es Salaam, compared their budding romance to the dawn of Tanzania’s independence. I conducted oral history interviews that, despite their notorious difficulties, shed light on the ways congregants related to the developments of the twentieth century. Elders from former UMCA congregations set their comments about the grand narratives of decolonization and nationalism within the context of their affective spiritual relationships. I took these insights and read “against the grain” and “between the lines” of the colonial and missionary sources not initially written with attention to women. My extensive reading of UMCA documents, of the occasional sources authored by women, and of secondary literature on Tanzania and Christianity in Africa over the past decade provided context for the stories that emerged, which told a strikingly nuanced picture of the affective and emotional dimensions of the lives of the UMCA’s female lay evangelists.

As I learned even more about the women I came to refer to as “sisters in spirit,” I was impressed by the friendships they forged at Mbweni, and by how they maintained them after moving with their husbands to stations on the mainland, all in a time when reliable communication was lacking and movement over a distance dangerous. It was clear that women in particular used the affective dimensions of their lives—their friendships and mentor/protégée relationships, emotions we would call homesickness and loneliness, and their romantic affairs—to create and police the boundaries of a community of believers. The UMCA’s female lay evangelists embodied a particular form of emotional and spiritual subjectivity to spread their faith across ethnolinguistic and cultural boundaries, and through time. Finally, I was struck that the particular theology of the UMCA was not only unique, but that it seemed to potentiate these connections by fostering a spiritual intimacy between adherents living and working at stations so far from one another.

At the heart of this book are stories of individual sisters in spirit whose daily lives and work produced the UMCA’s pan-ethnic and intergenerational affective spiritual community. Histories of affect, and particularly those using affective dimensions of people’s lives to tell broader stories, comprise a relatively young literature. There remains a certain experimental nature about the methods and the sources historians use to explore the affective dimensions of life. Of course, this has been true of African history and anthropology since the 1950s. Sisters in Spirit thus relies on traditional “objective” sources as well as more “subjective” sources to access affect, which I then use as an analytical tool rather than a research topic in its own right. Drawing the voices of African women out of these sources was possible
for several reasons: I recognized the “common sense” that shaped the archives, I was familiar with the social structures and the realities that shape women’s lives, and I was able to see their intersection with the contours of Tanzanian and sub-Saharan Africa. This approach contextualized the scattered ephemera, and allowed their voices to speak some of the choices and dilemmas female congregants and others on the frontiers of mission work across the continent faced.

As I began to explore the affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA’s female adherents, it became abundantly clear that not all UMCA actors, and indeed not all colonial actors, were “acting in the same theater.”55 Previous scholarship, and particularly Tanzanian historiography, tended to portray the rise of the modern nation-state and its attendant nationalisms as an inevitable result of the transition from empire. The accepted narrative focused on men involved in the institutionalized bureaucracies, on “proto-nationalist” organizations, and on the political parties that inherited the colonial state.56 It soon became clear that the concerns that motivated politically connected Anglican men in the 1940s and 1950s were not the same concerns that motivated their female counterparts in the 1860s and 1870s. Women like Beatrice Kilekwa, Rose Mtaula, Amy Malisawa, Mabel Ambali, and others among several generations of UMCA-educated African women did not live their lives in a way that matches the outlines of the established historiography or the accepted institutional chronologies. They lived their lives untidily, led by hopes and dreams, expectations and obligations, in a bid to make the most of their circumstances. They moved and they traveled, they sinned and they repented, and they loved and they lost, sometimes with an eye toward the emerging political community, although oftentimes not. To be sure, their lives were the product of a historical moment that was focused on building an entirely different type of moral economy: the first group of women to join the UMCA did so on June 25, 1865. After having been stripped of their affiliation with their home communities and reduced to the status of slave, they were “rescued” from a slaving dhow by sailors in the British navy.

While the nation-state of Tanzania eventually became a beneficiary of the pedagogical, emotional, and spiritual labors of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit—as the final chapters in this book illustrate—UMCA adherents initially came to see themselves as part of a deterritorialized affective spiritual community that catered to different needs entirely. When the first cohorts of female adherents joined the UMCA, they did so with little choice in the matter and employed locally resonant strategies designed to reduce their inherent vulnerability, forging
familial relationships and imputing kinship with their new patrons and with other members of their new community. In part because of the theological teachings of the missionaries and in part because of the demographic realities of the Zanzibar mission stations and those that developed on the mainland, these affective and kinship (both real and fictive) ties were pan-ethnic and intergenerational. The expectations of British missionaries and their particular labor practices enshrined these relationships as fundamental to the mission's evangelical work, and they came to constitute the heart of the UMCA's affective spiritual community. Focusing on the ways in which these relationships of affective spirituality came to influence strategies of evangelical expansion and the ways they influenced the boundaries of the community tells an entirely different story than that told by looking only at the UMCA's men, and by viewing the traditional sources in the same way. The story of the sisters in spirit is one in which the notion of community was deterritorialized; in which spirituality, ritual practice, and affective relationships created networks between geographically disparate congregations; and in which people applied old values to new circumstances.

Cultural Nationalisms

Looking at the affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA's sisters in spirit offers new insights about the role Christianity played in forming communities. In particular, their stories help us better understand the link between Christianity and the development of cultural nationalisms in Africa. Previous scholarship argued that ethnic identity was the most important identity to emerge from Africans' engagement with Christianity and the vernacular Bible. Christian education, as well as missionaries' and adherents' understandings of Christian doctrine and scripture, has been credited with the reification, consolidation, or “invention” of certain ethnic categories (such as Yoruba) during the colonial period.57 In this literature, ethnogenesis and the development of cultural nationalisms are directly related to the way in which the Bible conceives of—and biblically literate people imagine—humanity as broken into “nations” and “peoples” to which the church must speak directly.58 The Yoruba, whose path from liberated slave community to ethnic group Peel details in Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba, are a classic example of the historiographic connection between missionization and the development of cultural nationalisms. Efforts to train Africans in their mother tongue—and the missionaries' work in general—were based on the premise
that “the Yoruba” were a group that could and should be spoken of and to. The CMS missionaries envisaged an ethnolinguistic nation and, keenly aware of the formational potential of their language work, succeeded in creating one. Over time, Yoruba cultural nationalism came to constitute a major strand of anticolonial nationalism in Nigeria.

In contrast to this West African example are ex-slave mission communities that comprised individuals from a range of ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Perhaps the best-known of these is the CMS project in Kenya. Here, congregants’ status as former slaves, rather than their ethnic background, provided an element of unity. Few were able to escape their status as social and political inferiors in the post-abolition period. Their story as a community largely ends around 1900, and there were no substantive efforts to carry the project to create a pan-ethnic communion into the twentieth century or to new areas.

The UMCA’s first four decades were in many ways similar to those of the CMS, but several factors combined to produce an expansive, unified community that extended through several generations. Similar to the CMS, by the time the UMCA’s Bible men and women established their station at Zanzibar they had abandoned all hopes of working on behalf of a particular ethnic group, “people,” or “tribe.” The missionaries of the abolitionist UMCA set their sights on the spoils of the Indian Ocean slave trade, targeting freed slaves who hailed from communities throughout the mainland, including from what are today Malawi, Mozambique, and Congo, as well as Tanzania. Several factors provided a different outcome for the UMCA. The lack of a lingua franca among their adherents led the missionaries to settle upon Kiswahili—East Africa’s language of trade—as one of two languages of mission officialdom (the other being English). Among later cohorts of adherents—such as those who came to the mission as non-Swahili-speaking adults or those to whom the mission evangelized in their home villages on the mainland—the British missionaries had to balance their anxiousness to bring the scriptures to Africans with their very Tractarian desire to re-create Zion in East Africa. Evangelists struggled with the vernacular until inquirers could operate sufficiently well in English or Kiswahili. Because language among the UMCA’s diverse communities was not a singular vernacular, the quotidian embodied transmission of a particular brand of Christian femininity through affective relationships became a language that all community members could understand, helping to solidify this civilization or “race” of Christians in a way that individuals speaking different languages could never be. The idea of community that circulated among UMCA female lay evangelists,
church officials, and adherents was not bound to a particular ethnicity, nor did it emerge from the standardization of the vernacular and the subsequent translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Rather, adherents’ identity emerged from and was bound to a culture of Christian living and spiritual affinity.65

As this study illustrates, the UMCA’s founders encouraged their adherents to think of themselves as a distinct “race of intellectual Christians,” the core of a new Zion. Individuals from throughout East Africa found community with the UMCA, and extended those ties across ethnolinguistic boundaries and unconnected lands. The day-to-day work of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit made this possible, as did the relationships of affective spirituality that grew up among them. Clerics’ wives and fiancées from across the mission moved with their husbands to attend classes at St. Cyprian’s Theological College, learning to speak each others’ languages as they sat sewing on a missionary’s veranda. Young Christian women married across ethnic lines, seeking refuge with the church when their families grew angry. African clerics and their wives worked to adapt mission teaching to fit more closely with local customs. In these cases and others, women used quotidian, embodied performance of ideas, emotions, and affects as a way to transcend linguistic barriers. As a result, the pan-ethnic spiritual community that existed on Zanzibar in the 1870s and 1880s—contemporaneous with the CMS mission—still existed in the minds of believers living in geographically disparate communities nearly a century later. This outcome stands in stark contrast to the outcome of other missions across the continent, such as those of the White Fathers, the LMS, etc. In this book’s sixth chapter, I illustrate how UMCA African nuns in the 1940s and 1950s invested in the community as a new form of family and security, and the courtship between a highly educated aspiring teacher and cleric explored in chapter 7 illustrates that bonds of affective spirituality were the foundation through which they understood, conceptualized, and contributed to the new nation-state of Tanzania. The social position of a community built by ex-slaves had been greatly elevated by their own work in establishing new social hierarchies, and offering ideas that were picked up and improvised upon by people engaged in building a new nation.

**Gendered Intellectual Histories**

The affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit also offer new understandings about ways to access the intellectual histories of African women. There is a conceptual gap between the vigorous attention to the stories of gendered
subjectivities on the one hand, and intellectual histories in Africa on the other.\textsuperscript{66} To be sure, concerns about the lack of gender history that plagued earlier generations of feminist historians and historians of gender have largely disappeared, and the field of African intellectual history has recently undergone a resurgence. These new histories of ideas and thinking, however, rarely explore the gender dimensions of the biographies of intellectuals or their thought formation, attend to women's contributions, or make moves toward remedying gender inequity in the field.\textsuperscript{67} The questions scholars of intellectual history generally ask about knowledge, transmissions, and sensibilities are about men or male-dominant spheres, and are thus implicitly about masculinity.\textsuperscript{68} Weaving together gender, emotions, and thinking allows scholars to access intellectual histories of spaces that are often highly gendered, of gendered forms of knowledge, and of the domestic.\textsuperscript{69} Building on this historiographical concern with the intimate relationship between the intellectual and the affective, this book explicitly engages affect with knowledge and transmissions, ways of knowing with embodied being, and gendered subjectivities with the senses.

The female lay evangelist's embodiment of Christian civility and femininity, as well as her relationships of affective spirituality redraw the boundaries of what we consider to be "intellectual" and what we consider to be "politics." Intellectual work cannot be conceived of as merely written or spoken, but is embodied and performed, transmitted through affect and spiritual connection.\textsuperscript{70} Thus, rather than consider the erasure of women and femininities as inevitable, or rather than write women back into history and rehearse deeply entrenched "androcentric nationalist narratives," scholars must shift the definitions of "politics" and "intellectual" to include the domestic, embodied performance, and affect. The UMCA's sisters in spirit and the affective dimensions of their lives offer a way to rethink intellectual histories, the production of racial thought, and national imaginations.

Attending to the affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA's sisters in spirit allows us to see the novel ways in which they contributed to debates about the development of racial thought against a persistent backdrop of religious competition. To be sure, women's bodies continued to be sites for the struggle for moral authority. However, while some Africans argued over the length of women's miniskirts as a way to impose values and exert control over women, for example, the UMCA's sisters in spirit themselves policed community boundaries through their quotidian performance, their embodied ritual, and their affective relationships.\textsuperscript{71} The UMCA's female adherents used emotions such as love, lust, moral outrage,
and shame to police linguistic and racial boundaries. The alarm or inconvenience of “improperly” conceived pregnancies drove adolescents to seek abortions, and a mixture of what we might understand as fear, shame, horror, self-interest, and ambivalence caused scandal over a Christian granddaughter’s sexual dalliances with a local Muslim man. Such moments allow us to see the novel ways in which the UMCA’s women contributed to the ongoing struggle over community perpetuity and the articulation of spiritual and racial boundaries.

**Christianity**

Historians have been relatively reluctant to discuss the spiritual components of Africans’ engagements with mission churches, heeding warnings about the myriad instrumental and material motivations for affiliation. Yet, individuals’ stories can make it harder to ignore spiritual and religious motivations. The lives of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit require that we take religious faith and the power of the invisible world seriously, and that we trace their very real effects in the lives of its followers. Forces in the invisible world, such as spirits, ancestors, God, a shared spirit or consciousness, have real power—as real as the blush of new romance between lovers, or the long arm of the law that causes police to issue parking tickets. This book centers the unseen world of affects, spirits, and religion; takes it seriously as acting in the realm of the real and as having real power; and therefore treats the religious and political in the same frame. Attending to the unseen world, to affect and the spiritual aspects of religion, thus opens up avenues to see the formation of new subjectivities and of new forms of affinity and affiliation, such as the “sisters in spirit” whose embodied performances of Christian values potentiated a unique, inclusive spiritual community that crosscut and superseded ethnic affiliations. Indeed, rather than identify as Digo, Yao, Bondei, Makua, or Galla, for example, individuals who joined the mission prioritized a shared Christian civilization. By adopting a certain style of dress, by living in square houses, by speaking English and Kiswahili, and by carrying prayer books in their pocketbooks, congregants worked to bolster, sustain, and advance the values of this community. As the UMCA’s female lay evangelists in particular taught embroidery and literacy; as they performed companionate, monogamous marriage for new inquirers; and as they complained about their “heathen” neighbors, they forged a new type of subject, one who deliberately set herself apart by using her faith in the power of the unseen to build a very real community.
As the lives of the sisters in spirit became entangled with the broader changes that characterized the colonial period, their instructional, spiritual, and emotional labors came to incorporate more than just the UMCA community, but to incorporate the emergent nation-state of Tanzania and to take on more explicitly political dimensions. Several explorations of the theological or doctrinal elements of precolonial political movements and of the political resonances of indigenous spiritual movements offer productive models, but few studies have illustrated the ways in which Christian theology shaped individuals’ engagements with politics, on a local level or a national level.

Finally, while there is a growing secondary literature on African female Christians and their experiences in, and contributions to, church and national histories, African women are still underrepresented in the historiography. Historians of mission have long emphasized the need to explore African church leaders, adding African voices and perspectives to the history of African Christianity. Few have done so, and even fewer have looked explicitly at female church leaders or attended to gendered dynamics. Sisters in Spirit offers a history of African Christianity that foregrounds the quotidian, embodied work of unofficial female evangelists. Their gendered experiences as women are fundamental to this analysis, and also to the shape of the church itself. It was women’s gendered vulnerability that shaped the way in which the first cohorts of African women engaged with the church, and that underwrote the ties of patronage and dependency that constituted its evangelical strategy. Women cultivated ties of affective spirituality with British missionaries, with other women on their stations, with new inquirers, and with spouses, and relied on those ties when they moved to the mainland and to remote stations. Women relied on affective relationships to help them hem the boundaries of the community, to allow celibate women to serve as social mothers, and as a way to engage in an explicitly Christian way with the budding national community.

The work of the UMCA’s sisters in spirit offers new ways to understand the processes by which Africans engaged with the changing world around them over the course of the long twentieth century. The story of Beatrice Kilekwa brings into stark relief the networks of affective spirituality that persisted to define the lives of congregants living one hundred years later. Just as Beatrice drew on these networks to help her make sense of her move to Masasi, the Anglican teacher Rose Furahani drew on similar ideas to help her and her partner negotiate their role in the new nation-state.
of Tanzania. The love letters she and her fiancé exchanged illustrate that individuals applied values and lessons from the UMCA’s affective spiritual community to new circumstances, reasserting the importance of longer-standing spiritual affinities and religious values in new times. By the 1960s most of the missionaries the Furahanis and other UMCA adherents knew had departed Tanzania, taking with them much of the mission infrastructure. While the Anglican Church of Tanzania (the official body that comprises both former CMS and UMCA congregations) remains popular in southern Tanzania, the UMCA pulled out gradually over the course of the 1960s. UMCA-trained teachers and clerics were well represented in the ranks of anticolonial nationalists and in the early years of the new government. For all their educational prowess, the early involvement of UMCA-trained men in the transition government, and their expectations about inheriting the postcolonial state, their power was largely eclipsed in the years following independence. Many of their core ideas and values, however, live on in the inheritances of former UMCA adherents and in the work of the UMCA’s African nuns, for example, hinting at the contingencies of history.80