Sisters in Spirit
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Published by Michigan State University Press

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Epilogue

On a dry day at the start of the long rains of 2008, just before the road from Tanga became impassible, my research assistant Tom and I set out to make what was becoming a familiar drive to the village of Maramba. Together with the neighboring villages of Kigongoi and Magila, Maramba hosted bustling UMCA mission stations—which included churches, schools, a convent, and health centers—for approximately a century, until the formal UMCA mission organization pulled out of Tanzania in the 1960s. The history of the UMCA in the area dates back to the Reverend C. A. Arlington’s first visit to the Usambara Mountains in 1867, not long before the UMCA’s female lay evangelists turned this area of what is today northeastern Tanzania into a major node in the UMCA’s evangelical network. It was, in fact, where Blandina and Petro Limo settled to do their work after they departed from Zanzibar, where the nuns made their first start on the mainland, and where Rose and Gideon Furahani were born and raised. Today local residents speak fondly of the past, and lament that a declining economy and scant government support has forced younger generations to make their lives outside of the valley entirely. They scoff at the irony that the government’s single recent investment, a paved road intended to ease travel up the steep road from Maramba to Kigongoi, came without funds for maintenance. The road has since
buckled, rendering it impassable even in the dry season and with four-wheel drive, thus leaving Maramba and Kigongoi both increasingly isolated. Fortunately for us, Tom and I were only going to Maramba that day, and not further down the treacherous road; we had plans to visit Padre Luke and Mama Olivia Dunia, Maramba’s patriarch and matriarch.

Padre Luke and Mama Olivia were venerated by their parishioners, beloved by former students, and esteemed by many others within UMCA congregations, even in circles that extended far beyond Maramba. Well before visiting the lush valley with the deep red soil for the first time, I heard about the Dunias from priests in Dar es Salaam, congregants in Zanzibar, former pupils in Tanga, and nuns in Masasi. During their long lives, they, and their reputations, had traveled far and wide throughout the spiritual community. Thus when I finally arrived in Maramba to conduct historical research, most residents were willing to participate . . . with a caveat. Congregants would be happy to share their individual stories, they said, but they were adamant that I speak with Mama Olivia first. Only Mama had the complete history of the village, and no story, not even their own, would be complete without her input. Luckily, I had met Mama Dunia on my very first trip to the village.

On this particular afternoon in 2008, I had come to talk not with members of the wider spiritual community to whom she ministered, but with Mama Dunia herself. After Tom and I climbed the steep hill to the Dunias’ shamba and enjoyed chai and maandazi (spiced doughnuts) in the breeze on the porch, Mama and I settled down in the back room to talk. The bedroom was dark and cool, the large windows shaded by the pomelo trees growing on the farm. I sat on a squat loveseat, and Mama perched on the side of the bed that she had shared with her now-ailing husband since their wedding day in 1940. From the time of his stroke and paralysis in 1987, Mama Olivia had maintained a near-constant vigil at the bedside of the former priest, nursing an affliction she believed would kill him if left unattended for too long. She had explained when we spoke previously that she used the few hours of relief that her friends’ and family’s daily assistance afforded her to complete routine domestic tasks and the surprisingly large number of other small shamba chores she could still manage at the age of eighty-seven. To sell their produce in town, to maintain their home, to do the hard work on the shamba, and to procure basic necessities, the Dunias relied on the kindness of their grown daughter (a teacher in Maramba) and son (a banker in nearby Tanga), and on the countless people with whom they had cultivated relationships over the decades spent ministering to the people of the valley, and farther afield. This number included the Dunias’
neighbors, former parishioners, and the extended family of children Mwalimu Olivia had raised in the classroom.

Mama Dunia was a charismatic, energetic, and warm woman, and it had been immediately clear to me upon our first meeting why she was so adored by villagers, parishioners, and former pupils alike. Beyond that, however, it was evident that the relationships of affective spirituality that Dunia had cultivated with fellow congregants, students, and inquirers alike were paying dividends in the couple’s old age, continuing to undergird the community and its members both spiritually and physically.

Sitting across from Mama Dunia as she stroked her husband’s hand, I wanted to know what she thought about the life that had made her into the beloved village matriarch to whom neighbors sent supplies and for whom their children labored in the fields. What did she think about the community that she and the Padre had helped build, and the networks they had helped to strengthen? To her mind, what was the most valuable outcome of years spent teaching and ministering, I wondered? What was the contemporary relevance of the faith she and Padre Luke had planted through their relationships with others, their daily work, and their embodied, quotidian performances (albeit phrased in not so many words)?

Mama Dunia’s pride was clearly visible when she spoke of her role in the Maramba church. She told me that community members had long ago changed her name to “Mama Mwalimu.” The title, she explained in English, meant “Mother Teacher.” The name stuck even after she retired, she said, because she continued to care for the spiritual and physical well-being of her pupils. She boasted that she had never let a student go hungry. “Have you eaten?” she would ask. “Did you get drinking water?” Familiar enough with a student’s circumstances to know that a “yes” was not always the truth, she would fill the child with maandazi and chai and send her on her way.1 For Dunia, the line between teaching, ministering, and parenting was nonexistent—in each case, the job was to “love them physically and spiritually.” Dunia saw her investment in the health, well-being, and spiritual development of an individual child as an investment in the welfare of the entire community. “I didn’t want a person staggering in school,” she said, “so that the community will benefit.”2

Much of what Dunia said to me that day about her role in the spiritual community would have resonated with women like Beatrice Kilekwa and Rose Matula, whom we met in this book’s introduction. The day-to-day work of female lay evangelists in 1896 and in 2008 was, in fact, similar in many ways: all of these women taught in small, rural schools; they forged enduring relationships with students and
protégées, introducing Christianity among new cohorts and new generations; they visited homes of inquirers and congregants, treating village children as their own; and they did the hard quotidian work of Christian living in public. They established long-term, companionate, and (theoretically) monogamous relationships; they raised Christian children in full view of their parishioners; and they adopted the domestic habits and rituals of “practical” or “civilized” Christianity.3 While Beatrice, Rose, and their friends Amy and Mabel were unlikely, at least at first, to speak the same languages as their congregants or to know much about local customs, Dunia’s evangelism was rooted in the community in which she was born. The networks they forged, and the intimate friendships that sustained them physically and spiritually across disparate and discontiguous stations, however, were nearly identical. So too was their social position. Indeed, the social positions of all the women we have met in this book were similar: they all 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 a community on Zanzibar and the adjacent mainland over the course of nearly 150 years.

There were other aspects of Dunia’s life, however, that at first glance may not have been as easily recognizable to her sisters in spirit of nearly a century and a half ago. Perhaps most significant was the “community” at the heart of Dunia’s work. Rather than focus simply on the former UMCA spiritual community, Dunia’s attentions were attuned to a much broader community. She considered her work to have an explicitly national component. Teachers’ and clerics’ wives, she said, “should love everyone, should have good intentions of raising the nation . . . [of] advancing the nation.” Ultimately, she said, “I want development . . . my intention is progress, and not just for my family. No, my country has to [progress].”4 In her description of the role of a cleric’s wife and teacher, Dunia defined the nation-state of Tanzania as one of the central objects of her and her contemporary colleagues’ pedagogical, spiritual, and emotional labors. In so doing, she deliberately situated herself, her fellow clerics’ wives and teachers, and her community in a relationship to the Tanzanian nation-state.

To be sure, it is possible that my own status as an outsider and a trained historian may have shaped the way Dunia characterized her work. She may have assumed, as has been argued for respondents in rural Njombe, Tanzania, that I valued “stories of development, modernization, and nation-building” over, for example, the “private, intimate sphere of family and neighbors” in which interlocutors were the most
comfortable operating. In the context of different “interview” settings, proddings elicited different results. In settings elders deemed more “appropriate for turning their memories into instruction,” they “placed their accounts of the past not in the historians’ state-dominated chronology, but in a private, intimate sphere of family and neighbours.” The grand narratives of colonialism, nationalism, and independence figured little in their stories, but instead they told stories about individuals and set them in the context of family relationships. UMCA congregants, however, explicitly addressed the private, affective, intimate sphere in our conversations, and in the historical sources. Dunia and her colleagues actively placed their accounts of the past within a state-dominated chronology that intersected and overlapped with the private, intimate spheres of family and neighbors. They spoke, unprompted, about the grand developments of colonialism, nationalism, independence, and collective action. But they also spoke about their intimate relationships. Indeed, it was within the context of discussing emotional and spiritual bonds that they chose to comment on the grand narratives of nation and nationalism. Their affective spiritual relationships were the foundation through which they understood, conceptualized, and contributed to the nation in the first place.

Although in 2008 Dunia argued that the beneficiary of her and her colleagues’ labors was the nation-state of Tanzania, if I had asked Dunia in the late 1930s or early 1940s how she conceived of her responsibilities as a cleric’s wife and teacher, it is likely that Mama Dunia would have responded differently. In the 1930s and ’40s, when Mama Dunia was completing her teacher training and preparing to marry Padre Luke, neither the term “nation-state” nor the way of imagining the political space it represented were in circulation among rural Africans. Territorial nationalism and the modular unit of the nation-state—which is the most common form of sovereignty in the world today—are concepts that only gained currency in Africa after the Second World War. Indeed, Africans’ aspirations for political sovereignty in the form of the nation-state were largely the result of experiences during and around World War II. Soldiers returning from war proffered new ideas about democracy and equality, and shared stories of anticolonial independence movements. Expanding literacies and technologies of communication introduced new ways of conceptualizing political space. The experiences of strike actions and unionism led to new forms of solidarity. Finally, engagement with intellectual discourses from abroad offered new models of unity and aspirations for independence.

A mere two decades earlier, however, Africans coming of age between the world wars, including the young Mama Dunia, were living in a very different world. Theirs
was one in which other forms of political unity, such as Pan-Islamism, Pan-African-
ism, Pan-Asianism, forms of diasporic unity, such as Christian humanitarianism and
proletarian internationalism, offered equally viable and exciting paths toward the
future. The earlier forms of deterritorialized identity, which included the UMCA's
diverse affective spiritual community, shaped the realities, expectations, and
aspirations of interwar Africans, and vied at turns with more locally rooted iden-
tities. Even in the late 1950s, when some had begun to rally behind an anticolonial
nationalism and to agitate for decolonization, the nation-state was not the only
political community the majority of East Africans imagined. The world of colonial
Africans was complex and cosmopolitan, offering a host of affiliations, forms of
political solidarity, and transterritorial or deterritorialized networks from which to
choose. Elsewhere, Luo, Haya, Toro, Ganda, and Gikuyu people were concerned not
with solidifying an independent nation for Kenya, Tanganyika, or Uganda, but rather
with constructing a patria, or fatherland, “rooting people in place as inheritors of
their ancestors’ instructive customs and traditions.” Ethnic patriots were in fact
explicitly opposed to the idea of the nation-state, which “threw people together
without discrimination, undermining the institutions that protected moral order,”
and “severing the young from the instruction that history could provide.” Converts
of the East African Revival, a Christian conversion movement that began in the
mid-1930s in Rwanda and spread to Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda, were similarly
 unmotivated by the idea of the nation-state, for they imagined themselves as
pilgrims on the road toward their future home in Heaven. They were cosmopolitans
drawn together into a large, transcontinental community of confession, conversion,
and Christian revival. Other groups, such as the continent’s Pan-Africanists, focused
on the solidarity of Africans worldwide, and on the uplift of the “civilization” or
“race” as a whole. Still others were adamantly opposed to political independence
for Britain’s East African colonies, attempting instead to reform and restructure the
imperial unit to give Africans more influence over their own affairs. The speed
and finality with which decolonization came in the early 1960s surprised East
Africans and their British colonizers alike. Until then, there had been no reason to
believe that among the myriad forms of political organization and moral discourses
available, the nation-state would become the fate of African colonies across the
continent. It was the “contingent outcome of a variety of other aspirations.”

Thus if Mama Dunia had been asked in the 1930s or 1940s to imagine her role
as a cleric’s wife and teacher, it is unlikely that she would have responded as she
did when I asked her in 2008: by centering the nation-state as the recipient of her
pedagogical, emotional, and spiritual labors. Rather, she and her colleagues likely would have imagined the beneficiary of those efforts to be the UMCA's deterritorialized affective spiritual community—a community held together by the constant pilgrimages of congregants, by intimate relationships of affective spirituality, and by a set of commonly held, though always negotiated, values. As we saw in the latter half of this book, by the 1930s UMCA congregants had come to see themselves as part of a diverse and encompassing spiritual community that cut across colonies, ethnic associations, and civil organizations with little attention to the paradigm of “resistance” or “oppression” that scholars often attribute to nationalism's political innovators. Instead, UMCA congregants were concerned with composing a community attuned to the values of Christian modernity, supra-tribal unity, and racial exclusivity, and they actively worked to maintain and enforce the boundaries of this community.

Over the course of the 1930s through the 1950s, however, UMCA congregants became entangled with new ideas and new forms of political organization, such as those described above, and mapped the longer-standing social, cultural, and religious ideals of the UMCA onto new and emerging, explicitly political, communities. Yet, all the while they refused to lose sight of the outlines of the spiritual community. Perhaps in this way, then, Dunia's articulation of the aims of her labor were not fundamentally different from the way her sisters in spirit understood their work 150 years earlier. Dunia's work remained about using affective spiritual relationships as the basis for spreading the Gospel and the civilizational tenets particular to the UMCA community. Rather than supplanting or replacing the concerns of individual Africans, nationalism and the nation-state became incorporated into the way that Dunia and other members of the former UMCA's spiritual community understood their evangelical mission. The nation-state was, in other words, one of the concerns of UMCA congregants' efforts, but by no means their sole interest.

Attending to affect and to the affective dimensions of the lives of the UMCA's female evangelists highlights the perils of attempting to read these stories backward, through the teleological lens of nationalism that has held historians of Tanzania, among others, in its grip. Instead, attending to affect, emotions, and in particular to the relationships of affective spirituality of the UMCA's sisters in spirit, opens up a range of new insights about the past. For one, we can see the formation of new subjectivities and of new forms of affinity and affiliation, such as the female lay evangelists whose embodied performances of Christian values potentiated a unique, inclusive spiritual community that crosscut and superseded
ethnic and national affiliations. We have seen that rather than identify as Yao, Nyamwezi, Bondei, Makua, or Digo, congregants prioritized their affective spiritual ties/bonds, illustrating that the term and the study of cultural nationalisms can incorporate more than the study of ethnicity and race, but can also encompass communities of religion and belief. Taking affect and belief seriously, and as acting in the realm of the real, we can see community forms that the voices, actions, and writings of men and cultural organizations cannot express. It allows us, as was the case for therapeutic networks in Buganda, to see past “what [was] left’ in the organizational repertoire” when ethnographers composed the earliest descriptions of African communities. For many scholars of Christianity and nationalism in Africa, this “what was left” was ethnicity and ethnic cultural nationalisms, and it has been the taken-for-granted form of organization, affiliation, and expression that motivated Africans in Tanzania and beyond. Attending thusly to quotidian performance, affect, and belief, we obviate the problematic theoretical assumption that ethnicity was the single or most salient outcome of Africans’ engagement with the vernacular Bible and mission Christianity. We uncover instead a new realm in which discourse about morality, civilization, and culture unfolded, one that includes congregants from distinct ethnicities and backgrounds, and that spread across disparate lands.

Further, attending to the quotidian, embodied performance of sisters in spirit over a century and a half—clerics’ wives and teachers, nurses and nuns, mothers and daughters—demands we change our definitions of “intellectual” and of “politics.” The daily lives of these women illustrate that intellectual history can be accessed through the domestic realms of the past. It is not merely written or spoken, but is embodied and performed. Recognizing this will provide us access to new intellectual networks, and allow us to better understand how intimate lives, feelings, and actions influenced institutional action. We can also see the gendered aspects of the increasingly robust intellectual history of Africa, and access the modes of thinking of newly forged social categories and subjectivities. The dreams and aspirations of contingent and gendered subjectivities will emerge from the shadows when we attend to affects, emotions, embodied performance, and the domestic.

Finally, attending to affect and emotions allows us access to marginalized and contingent historical actors such as women and other subalterns. Listening to these stories can help us better understand the unfolding of broader processes of the long twentieth century—specifically, they allow us to see that not all efforts of colonial subjects were directed toward forms of community and groupness that
were “inherently inclusive and liberating,” but were rather hemmed by individuals and ways of thinking that acted to police and circumscribe the boundaries of community.15 We see also radical and unique forms of affinity that were eclipsed by the victorious, male-centric, anticolonial nationalism of organizations such as TANU, and others that inherited the colonial state and its institutions. Taken together, this allows us to hear stories of Africans on their own terms, rather than on those that a small group of nationalists or their Western biographers and historians choose to tell about them. It allows us to see their lives in greater relief—their raw and complicated emotions, their aspirations and strivings, their loves and their losses, their faith and their failures—and to write a much richer version of the past.