

## *Chapter 2*

# BECOMING AND BELONGING IN AFRICAN HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY, 1900–2000

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As young Beti women memorize the catechism, they learn to entreat God to make them honourable women, despite their school and modernity. But in other contexts, they hope that education and modernity themselves will have this power, making them honourable in a new way.

—Johnson-Hanks, *Uncertain Honor*

### **Beginnings**

**I**t was pouring with rain. It was more than pouring. It was pounding so hard that it was bouncing off the veranda and in through the open shutters and spattering my laptop. The laptop was useless anyway. It had died that morning and there was no power. I was in the Catholic parish of Itira, on the northern side of Ukerewe Island in Lake Victoria, Tanzania. I could smell the rain and I could smell the lake. Everything was damp, and I was being interrogated.

Why would the Archbishop have given me permission to access the parish archive if I wasn't even Catholic? Was I Anglican? No. Presbyterian? No. Lutheran? No. But I must be something! It was an examination I had been through before, but my standard response – that in my home country not everyone had a religion – was not working and the parish priest was getting frustrated. In following

years, I faced the same question repeatedly in parishes across East and Central Africa. Clergy and parish staff found my lack of religion in turns an evangelical challenge, a curious novelty and simply a shame. At church services, I joined the singing and the prayers, partly because I liked them, but also to avoid confusing the children and the nuns who thought they could at least assume religious affinity with the stranger who had landed in their village to copy parish registers day after day – they could at least place me.

Explaining my own identity in religious communities in Africa made it clear that what had seemed a straightforward, contained, doctoral thesis topic was a tangle of meaning and personhood that would take years to unravel and to understand. I had posed what seemed a simple problem and solution: little is known about Africa's demographic past because of the lack of data (Kuczynski 1948; Brass 1968), so I wanted to reconstruct a series of micro-demographic histories using church records, as was achieved for historical Europe (Fleury and Henry 1956; Knodel 1979; Wrigley and Schofield 1989). It soon became clear that more profound questions had to be answered first about the nature of Catholic and religious identity in Africa, the meaning of Christian conversion in an expanding church, and the interrelationships between morality, power and evidence in colonial contexts and in demographic research.

In this chapter, I address these questions in relation to the Counting Souls Project<sup>1</sup> through two frameworks described by Kreager and Bochow in the introduction to this volume. The first speaks to the literature on compositional demography. I consider how the categories imposed by missionaries dictated the population in observation, and how that population changed over time as evangelization progressed and the church expanded (Szreter, Sholkamy and Dharmalingam 2004; Kreager 2011). The second framework borrows from Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' work on vital conjunctures – which she defines as 'the full set of conditions relevant to the ongoing flow of action at a given time . . . the historically specific situations in which structure is mobilized and social action takes place' – and construal – 'the actor's interpretation of, and engagement with, the conjuncture in the form of demographically relevant action' (Johnson-Hanks 2007: 13–14). I argue that in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africa, it was often the very contingency of life that led people to associate with the church, and that association not only had the power – through economic empowerment, education and healthcare – to change fortunes and conjuncture, but also affected on a deeper level the construal

through which people responded, decided and enacted reproductive choice. I propose a concept of moral demography that operates in the space between the individual and the social, at the interface where populations are made by a series of micro-events arising from individual-level decisions themselves shaped by and shaping the macro-hegemonic context. It is a framework that enables 'problematic' evidence to speak the stories it is best suited to tell. I aim to show that the value of church archives in colonial and missionary contexts may be their ability to illuminate the structuring and restructuring of moral codes governing reproduction, as much as their role in estimating demographic rates.

### **Moral Demography: Towards a Framework**

If "moral economy" is the study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn those norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures' (Sayer 2000), moral demography is the study of how demographic decision-making is structured by a set of codes about honour and respectability ('moral dispositions'), which interact with people's contingent circumstances to produce demographic outcomes (Bledsoe and Banja 2002; Johnson-Hanks 2004, 2006). Let us simplify to the basic units of individuals and events, the confluence of which represents a 'vital conjuncture'. We can consider those conjunctures from two perspectives. The first is reality: what is the actual occurrence of conjunctures in the world and over time? The second is from the perspective of what we can measure (Figure 2.1). As demographers, we try to make the measurement and occurrence circles overlap, and if they do not, we try to describe the extent of the discrepancy (e.g. bias).

Describing the discrepancy (or planning a study to minimize the discrepancy) requires consideration of context. Context affects two things. First, context should influence the categories that we choose for our measurement instruments. In order for our tools to have sensitivity for capture, they must be designed appropriately to identify all relevant events and individuals in a specific place and time. Prospectively, we try to be aware of how our own expectations might affect our imagining of local categories. Retrospectively, we identify shortcomings in measurement categories as a reason for bias. Second, context affects the construal through which (a) demographic action occurs and (b) its measurement may be determined.

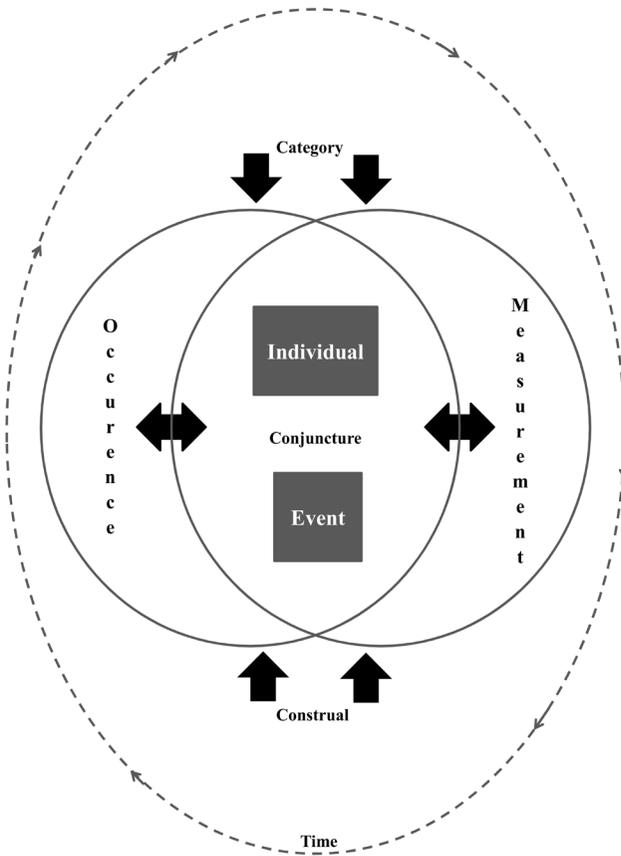


FIGURE 2.1 Moral Demography Framework

Construal is the sociomoral framework within which individual decisions about reproduction/family formation/health take place. It is also the lens through which demographic measurement tools are designed (i.e. it affects how we categorize). There is a feedback loop between occurrence, measurement and construal, in that as events/conjunctures become normative, they also become more measurable. In the moral demography framework, it is to be expected that the occurrence and measurement circles would increasingly overlap with time, all other things remaining equal.

In a longitudinal study, the outer circle, ‘time’, plays a complicating role. People may start acting or reporting more in line with the measurement categories, as those categories are increasingly seen as ‘condoned’, or in order to avoid lengthy additional questionnaires to document complex scenarios, or because they become aware of

incentives. Equally, the construal may change over time, affecting both occurrence and measurement. For example, in Demographic Surveillance Sites in Sub-Saharan Africa, the provision of anti-retroviral therapies affects people's willingness to present for HIV testing (by providing incentive and reducing stigma), as well as the transmission rate, thereby affecting both occurrence and measurement (Roura et al. 2009a, 2009b). Often the institution defining the measurement tool has considerable influence over the construal, with the power to 'normalize' and incentivize, even in an observational study. While the feedback loop between occurrence, construal and measurement draws the occurrence and measurement circles closer, it can also lead to increasing atypicality in relation to a wider population.

In using church registers to measure long-term demographic trends in Africa, these relationships become starker because the records were not designed specifically for demographic research, and the Roman Catholic Church played a deliberate and active role in (re)defining moral codes governing reproduction (Hunt 1999; Smythe 2006). The church created measurement categories and deliberately sought to change the construal context of reproductive decision-making (Hunt 1988, 1991). The categories it employed and the attitude it fostered were not constant over time, and understanding the outer loop of the framework (representing time) is crucial to comprehending censoring effects for different cohorts. In Figure 2.2, key aspects of the church's relationship with local people are overlaid on the original framework and they will be considered here from three interlinked perspectives: first, from the point of view of categorization; second, in relation to composition and censoring; and, third, from the perspective of conjuncture.

### **Categorization**

I was in the passenger seat of the priest's pickup driving back to Mua Parish from Sunday mass at an outstation. In between dodging chickens and potholes, he was telling me about his decision to join the White Fathers and to devote his life to ministry in Malawi. He was reflecting on the enormous privilege of being a parish priest in rural Africa, of the opportunity it offered to be present at the most important junctures of a person's life: to baptize a newborn, to officiate at the marriage ceremony, to visit people in time of sickness and to be present at the time of death. He contrasted his

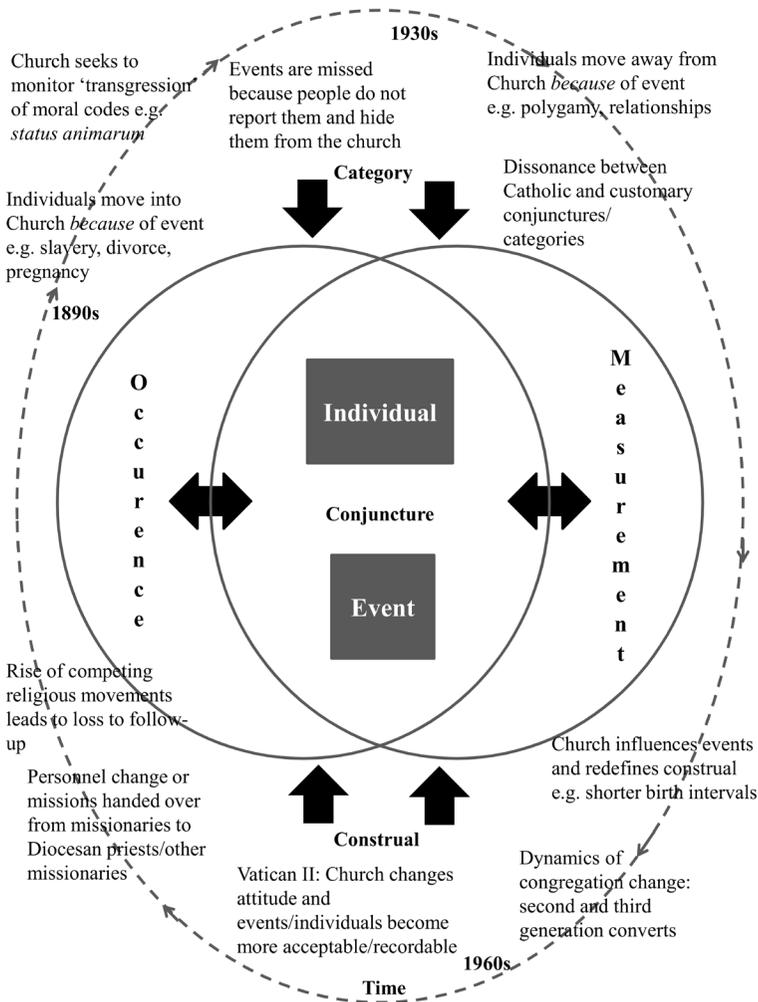


FIGURE 2.2 Moral Demography Framework, with Timeline

situation with that of other volunteers working all over Africa. All were 'outsiders', but he had the advantage of working through the well-constructed system of the Roman Catholic Church and the White Fathers' mission.<sup>2</sup> This allowed him instant access into those most intimate moments of a person's life, without question as to his authenticity or doubt as to his intentions.

Given my plan to reconstruct long-term trends in African demography using the records of baptism, marriage and burial kept by a missionary church, I was happy to hear of the missionary's presence

and acceptance at these junctures. Yet, underlying his words was a theme that had been playing on my mind for some time. The theme was one of cultural encounter and, in particular, encounter around the contested and morally-charged moments of reproduction and family formation. The church and traditional authority all over Africa are deeply concerned with those moments. They mark them in various ways, they understand them in various ways and in turn they influence them in various ways. I wanted to know how those different conceptions of being and becoming could lead to restrictions in categorization and in turn to possible shortcomings in the parish record.

Even in Europe, the use of parish registers for demographic reconstruction has been critiqued for missing data on particular categories of people (Ruggles 1992). In order to convert parish counts of baptisms, marriages and deaths into demographic rates, a technique known as family reconstitution is applied, through which female marital fertility histories are re-created via record linkage (Wrigley 1966; Wrigley et al. 1997; Wrigley and Schofield 1973). Any woman not known to be resident throughout her married life (i.e. with no remarriage or burial date) is therefore discarded from analysis, as are illegitimate children. Certain demographic aspects of life were also underrecorded or not recorded, such as stillbirths and extramarital/premarital sexual relationships. Hence, in Europe, the ability to reconstruct 'realistic' demographic histories is constrained by (a) what the church considered 'legitimate' family formation and sexuality and (b) the logical confines of family reconstitution.

In Africa, the gap between reality and record is larger because of the greater dissonance between Christian and customary conceptions of the family and moral sexuality. Catholic dreams of stable, nuclear, patrilocal family structures were confronted with realities where extended families were the norm, where pater and genitor were often conflated, fostering was common, life was short, divorce was frequent, and extramarital and premarital sex were more accepted than in Europe (Goody 1976; Vaughan 1983). Polygamy was traditionally practised in many of the parishes studied, and was associated with long periods of postpartum abstinence and breastfeeding (Page and Lesthaeghe 1981; Schoenmaeckers 1981; van de Walle 1988). These traditional modes of reproduction were censured by Catholic priests. Polygamy was a barrier to baptism, and men were forced to 'put away' additional wives before they could receive the sacraments (Hastings 1974). Temptation into polygamous unions was seen as a considerable threat to the church, as described by a

colonial official on his visit to one of the parishes in this study in the 1930s: 'The converts, according to the Father Superior, number 1800 but only one thousand are considered to be satisfactory members of the church. Plural wives, which are, as usual, the chief stumbling block are said to have increased in numbers among the Christians in late years – probably since the Chief set the example of polygamy' (Baker 1931: 19–20).

Given that the structure of the church registers was imported from Europe, there is a potential problem of only being able to measure 'satisfactory' Catholics in this context of fluidity between Catholic and customary modes of family organization. Given that the church was actively trying to instil Catholic family ideals and morals of reproduction in Africa, and intervened directly and indirectly to achieve those aims, we not only risk losing data on unsatisfactory Catholics, but we may also be blinkered to the influence of the church and the direction of change (Walters 2016). Examples of church intervention in reproduction include attempts to institutionalize maternity and childcare and campaigns to change feeding patterns and to reduce birth spacing and abstinence (which was considered to be linked to the 'problem' of polygamy), and the excommunication or censure of those who did not conform (Hunt 1988, Summers 1991). In the first half of the twentieth century, the church also tried to prevent male and female initiation and coming-of-age ceremonies, where much instruction about sexual and marital behaviour was traditionally transmitted (Varkevisser 1973). We are therefore trying to measure change using sources created by the very agents who were promoting and influencing that change (with some success, according to anthropological studies) (Wilson 1957: 257, Raum 1972: 43, see also Hunt 1988: 408). However, before dismissing the registers as biased or unreliable, it is worth exploring in more detail the records that were kept and the priestly motivations.

The nine parishes included in the Counting Souls Project are some of the oldest and most important parishes in Catholic East Africa (Figure 2.3). They were all founded by the White Fathers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Villa Maria, Mua, Bukumbi and Chilubula were the first Archdiocesan seats in their respective territories. The founding principles of the White Fathers emphasized good recordkeeping, language learning and deep knowledge of specific communities, with some missionaries spending most of their adult lives living and working in a single parish or linguistic area (Burrige 1966; Shorter 2006; Ceillier 2008; Nolan 2012).

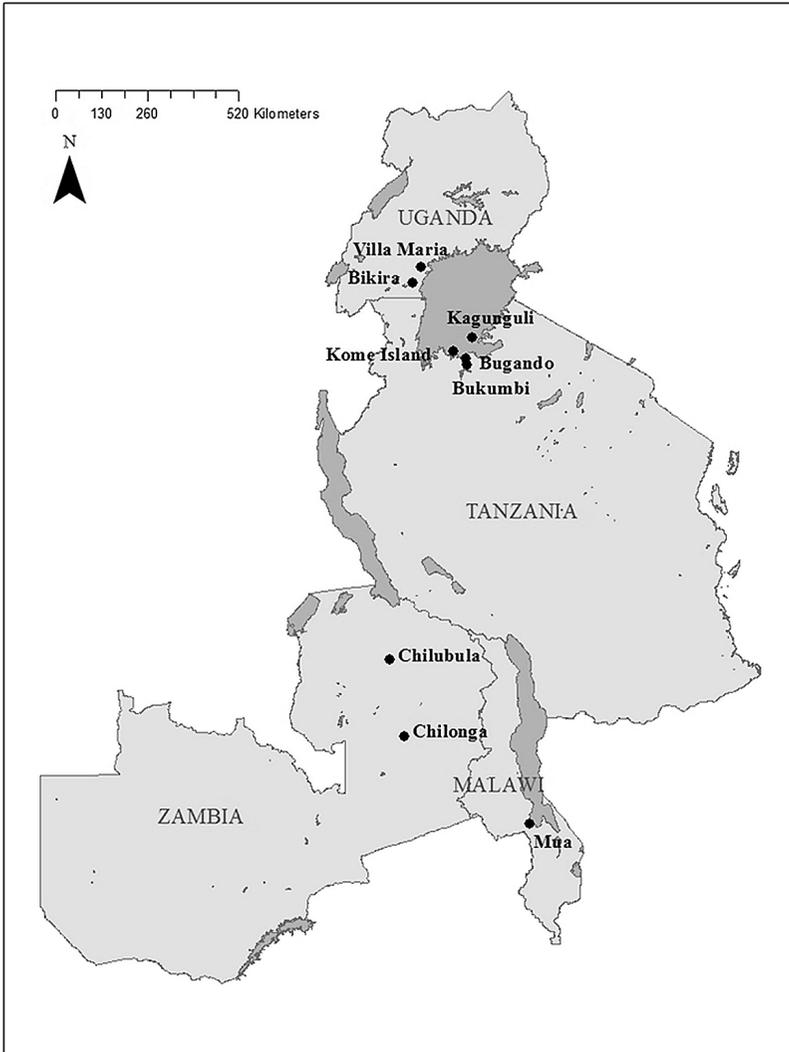


FIGURE 2.3 Map of the Nine Parishes Included in the Counting Souls Project (Including the Four Tanzanian Parishes in the Mwanza Historical Demographic Database)

Priests became skilled (often unsung) Africanist linguists, historians and anthropologists, and claimed greater understanding of those communities than the colonial authorities, often acting as mediators and translators between people and the state (Garvey 1994; Hinfelaar 2004). Their superior cognisance extended to demographic

issues, and missionaries were aware of the demographic value of their parish register data: White Fathers in western Tanzania critiqued the 1948 census on the basis of their parish counts and in 1980s Zambia they were reading the latest publications in European historical demography (copies of papers by Peter Laslett and Tony Wrigley exist in their archive in Lusaka). The parish register data kept by the White Fathers are particularly suited to demographic reconstruction because they founded some of the earliest parishes in the interior of the continent (thereby reducing the problem of censoring); there is an extensive system of cross-referencing and family record cards; and the archives are well maintained (at least in parishes where the White Fathers have remained resident) (Feltz 1990; Shorter 2006). Lutheran missions in Africa kept family books similar to the Catholic *status animarum*, and these have been used previously for historical demography in East and South Africa (Colwell 2000; Notkola 2000; Notkola and Siiskonen 2000).

The archives of all parishes were fully digitized, resulting in an archive of more than 175,000 photographs and about half a million events (Walters 2016). Data were extracted manually into a database and family reconstitution was performed.<sup>3</sup>

In Uganda, records were found of baptism (including of people in danger of dying), confirmation and marriage. In all other parishes, additional records included death registers and the family cards known as *libri status animarum*. In Malawi and Zambia, in- and out-migration records were also located, although these were not kept as consistently as the other books. All parishes keep records of premarriage enquiries and interviews with potential spouses. Record linkage is facilitated by numerical cross-referencing between the books and by the *status animarum*. These *libri status animarum* ('states of souls' registers) were used to determine whether or not a person was eligible to receive communion (Laslett 1977; Del Panta, Rettaroli and Rosental 2006). They therefore contain extensive comment about people's actual circumstances, including living arrangements, relationships and moral character. For example, in Mua (the Malawi), *status animarum* contain remarks such as 'Pedro is in South Africa, he left a girl here pregnant', or 'Michaeli is lazy and does not pray nor care for his wife', or 'Sofia is in Golomoti with Juventus. Juventus is Anglican', or 'Frances has gone mad and run away to Blantyre'. In the Zambian parishes, *status animarum* were kept in book form, with approximately half a page for each family. Although fewer remarks were found in the Zambian books about moral character, there is detail of relationship histories, with foster/stepchildren listed, with

parents' names (even if those parents were themselves not baptized). In Likoma (Malawi), Anglican records included a 'person book', wherein were recorded a person's attendance at church and any periods of absence or excommunication (suspension from church or from receiving the sacraments) (Walters, Hellinger and Masquelier 2013).<sup>4</sup> Considerable detail is given, including dates of excommunication and restoration, description of repentance and outcome, and the priests' assessment of peoples' shifting moral character (Walters 2016). Similarly, Tanzanian and Zambian Catholic records note attendance at specific services and the amount paid in tithes, opening the possibility of distinguishing between active, practising Christians and those who had simply been baptized.

Therefore, in demanding that people conform to Catholic structures, priests worked hard to document transgression of those structures. Missionary accounts and scholarly articles reflected on such topics as 'The Christian Who Does Not Practise' and the problems of polygamy, illegitimacy and divorce (Tanner 1969). Priests saw the lack of adherence to Catholic structures not as something to hide, but as something to record, understand and ultimately overcome, meaning that the 'problem' of categorization is not as severe as might be expected. Indeed, the documentation of transgression enabled missionaries to make estimates of illegitimacy, polygamy and divorce in their parishes (Linden and Linden 1974: 189).<sup>5</sup>

Although categorization might be a lesser problem than expected, the White Fathers' proclivity for probing into the intimate lives of their parishioners was not constant over time and place. Some priests were more inclined to interrogate and to document than others and, in general, the earlier registers are more detailed than later ones. This could be because congregations were smaller, and therefore it was easier to keep track of individuals, or because missionaries had a greater interest and incentive to follow the lives of the earlier (hard-won) generations of converts. Certainly, there was a wider decline in recording (diaries, letters, etc.) over time, and it became less common for follow-up data to be recorded in multiple places (e.g. for the marriage to appear on a person's baptism record as well as in the marriage register). As literacy improved, priests passed aspects of parish administration to local clerks, and there was a concomitant decline in the extent and consistency of recording, particularly of the informal detailing of people's actual living arrangements and transgression of Catholic structures. The decline was particularly noticeable when parishes were handed over to the diocese, a transmission that accords with the White Fathers' sustainability policy, but that had an

effect on the continuity of recording. This gives rise to the paradox that the parishes where Catholicism spread most successfully were also those with the weakest recording and the least detail on the actual lives and relationships of parishioners (Walters 2016).

The varied intensity and quality of recording means that censoring does not always happen at specific time points, which gives rise to compositional effects. For example, while finite censoring – such as the start or end of a particular register or the founding/closing of a parish – can be accounted for in the analysis, more gradual change – such as increasing literacy and use of local clerks or the slow simplification of recording due to the expansion of the parish – is much harder to deal with statistically. If not accounted for, demographic rates appear to change when the driver is in fact the changing constitution of the population in observation (i.e. usually an increasing loss of information on less committed Catholics). There are ways to mitigate this, such as restricting observation to those baptized as infants or to those who have attended a church service in the past year. However, care needs to be taken to achieve consistency over time and place, and additional information beyond the basic parish books of baptism, marriage and burial is required, such as books of tithes or services where an individual's presence at church is recorded. The compositional effects of not accounting for censoring due to changing conceptual categories over time would compound actual compositional effects in the population.

## **Composition**

There is no doubt that the composition of the Catholic population of East Africa changed over time, and that change has implications for the demographic analysis (Hastings 1979, 1996; Hinfelaar 1994; Isichei 1995; Peel and Falola 2005; Sundkler and Steed 2000). We can take both an individual and a population-based approach to composition. The former entails examining individual life histories and conversion narratives to understand why and when people converted, and what factors led them to disassociate. The latter entails understanding how the shape and structure of the Catholic population evolved. Both perspectives are revealing of the censoring effects and may also help us understand the degree of 'typicality' in relation to the wider population.

Taking the individual-level perspective, missionary diaries document the missionaries' relationship with the surrounding population

and how it developed. Early diaries describe life histories of some of the first converts. They note reasons for conversion, including the missions' work freeing people from slavery (Austen 1968; Nolan 2008), its attraction to people trying to escape from their marriages or families (Larsson 1991; Grondin 1995; Hodgson 2005), and the use of medicine and material aid by the mission to draw people to the church (Smythe 1999), early converts therefore often had atypical demographic or economic profiles, and faced significant struggles with traditional authority and sometimes their own families about their decision to join the church (Waliggo 1976; Hunt 1999: 43). There were also many baptisms in danger of death in the late-nineteenth century, and these were sometimes recorded in the standard baptism register, further complicating the profile of the early Catholic population.<sup>6</sup>

Later missionary diaries depict how increasing competition from other denominations as well as increased mobility and (male) migration became a threat to Catholicism, both in terms of physical attrition to the congregation and through exposure to immoral living. An example from the Chilubula parish diary of 29 October 1907 is one among many describing the priests' worries about how their congregations would be affected by labour migration and the growing draw of Protestantism:

In the course of the dry season, several young men from Chilubula and the surroundings left for the Mines District. They left more or less on the sly, without explaining to us the reasons why they were moving out. We are informed in a letter from \*\*\*\*\* that three of our Christians . . . are planning to go to the Protestant Mission of Kadowe to learn English. This desire to learn English is very common among the youth, and perfectly legitimate, and we shall have, sooner or later, to take steps to satisfy this demand . . . Others have signed in for service in the militia. We are not particularly pleased with their decision, for we are convinced there was no need for them to look for work outside their villages. There is plenty of work in the villages. In other words we are convinced that they are needlessly exposing themselves to lose their faith and their souls in the process. Far from the Mission and the spiritual care we lavishly bestow on them, they are exposed to constant and serious dangers to their souls and their salvation. We are greatly upset by their decision, for they are our spiritual children and we are their spiritual fathers. What is going to happen to the wives they leave behind unprotected? For they won't be back very soon. All those who signed in for work in faraway places are all married men.

Another reason that people left (or were pushed from) the church in parishes such as Mua (Malawi), Chilubula (Zambia) and Bukumbi (Tanzania) was growing antagonism between the mission and local secret societies and traditional authority (Linden and Linden 1974; Garvey 1994; Hinfelaar 1994). These societies were seen as a direct threat to the mission's influence, and the excommunication of certain individuals known to be active members is detailed, as well as competition with secret societies for control over important moments in peoples' lives. Death was a particularly contested moment, a time when priests wanted to be present to hear confession and to perform the last rites, but people also wanted to ensure the safe passage of their ancestors into the spirit world. In Mua, the local population went so far as to hide people who were dying in the bush from the priests in order to ensure control over the passage of the soul and the funeral proceedings (Linden and Linden 1974).<sup>7</sup> When, as in this case, points of rupture between mission and people are also moments of demographic conjuncture, there is a real risk that demographic events are missed from the record; battles for control over transitional moments in the life course lead to informative censoring.

Further loss to follow-up occurs when people were forced from the church due to 'immoral' behaviour. The missionary diaries abound with such stories. For example, in Chilubula it was noted that:

Some Christians have begun to shame their Church by their behaviour. One left his lawful wife to go and live with a woman in Kasama. Another who was married in church with a non-baptized woman chased her to marry another outside the church. There is another one that is on the point of doing the same. Two others, whose marriage in church was delayed until their former traditional union was declared nil [*sic*] and void by the court in Kasama, could not wait for their cases to be properly solved and came to cohabit together in the sight of the whole Christian community. The guilty couples were warned they were to mend their ways, or they would be excommunicated. (Chilubula diary, 8 September 1907)

Excommunications did indeed subsequently occur and because this happened at the point of relationship change (conjuncture), this once again points to informative censoring.

From the point of view of censoring, the strength (and length) of conversion to Christianity is also relevant, and this is documented in the diaries. Several priests noted that although the very earliest

Catholics may have been ‘atypical’ as far as the wider population was concerned because their motivation for conversion was some form of crisis – their deliverance from crisis through the mission may have inspired greater loyalty and commitment than among later generations. One missionary in Tanzania noted that by 1907, Christianity ‘was becoming a pleasantly approved social custom, lacking all the ardour and conviction shown by the first converts’ (quoted in Iliffe 1979: 231). Similarly, in Chilubula, a priest wondered: ‘Is the euphoria that marked the beginning of Christianity at Chilubula, the fervour of the first Christians, coming to an end?’ (Chilubula diary, 8 September 1907). The worry for demographers is that a decline in religious fervour may imply a decline in follow-up rates. Luckily, in African Catholic registers the problem of censoring is mitigated to some degree by the collection of cross-sectional information on attendance at services and in the periodic parish censuses that enable a means of censoring that is independent of outcome.

At the population level, the annual patterning of new baptisms shows significant jumps in certain years, often coincident with specific events (Figure 2.4). For example, the postwar peak in 1918–20 in the Tanzanian parishes occurred at a time of famine and epidemic, when the mission was extremely active in providing food and material aid to the parish. The earlier peak in the 1890s coincided with a missionary policy of baptizing people when they were in danger

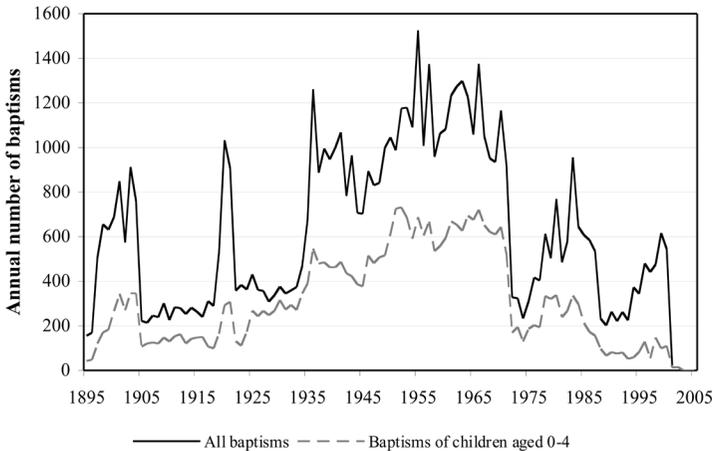


FIGURE 2.4 Annual Number of New Baptisms to Children and Adults in the Four Tanzanian Parishes (Source: Mwanza Historical Demographic Database (MHDD); see Walters 2008)

of dying, and many of those early converts did not survive. The trough during the Second World War occurred because of upheavals at that time due to the conflict in East Africa, and the internment or departure of German and Italian missionaries. In the 1970s, Julius Nyerere's Villagization policy caused considerable upheaval and population movement, which clearly impacted both on people's tendency to baptize their children (the number of new baptisms to children fell by two-thirds), as well as the ability of the church to attract new adult converts (Yeager 1989). Changing rates of baptism imply changing censoring effects for fertility analysis, and changing motivation (e.g. for food aid or for spiritual reasons) imply differing populations of converts. This graph looks rather different if plotted for each of the four Tanzanian parishes separately, and different again if plotted for the Zambian, Ugandan and Malawian parishes. Dealing systematically with this type of parish-specific compositional change is not straightforward and requires additional information on follow-up and church attendance.

The first decades of this missionary church were a time of expansion (Hastings 1996). The first converts aside from those baptized in danger of dying were adults, who were able to understand the missionaries' explanations and make rational decisions about whether or not to join the church. As those first-generation converts began to have their own families, the profile of the population changed and increasing numbers of infants and children (second-generation Christians) were baptized (Figure 2.5). There are limits to the analysis that can be conducted using the first-generation converts because of their potential 'atypicality' (i.e. many were freed slaves/runaways) and because their life histories are left-censored at the time they join the church. This censoring is mitigated in some parishes – for example, in Zambia, the wider history of each family is documented in the *status animarum*, and in most parishes the marriage enquiry books contain details of the relationship history of converts. The surest means of dealing with censoring is to restrict analysis to people baptized as children, but much of the earlier data must be discarded in this case.

Another compositional effect is the change in the balance of men and women seeking baptism over time. In the Tanzanian parishes, more men than women sought baptism as adults in the colonial period (with a dip in the adult sex ratio during the Second World War), but following independence in 1961, the sex ratio reversed, and women became the primary converts, with their majority increasing in every decade between the 1960s and 1990s (Figure 2.6). The

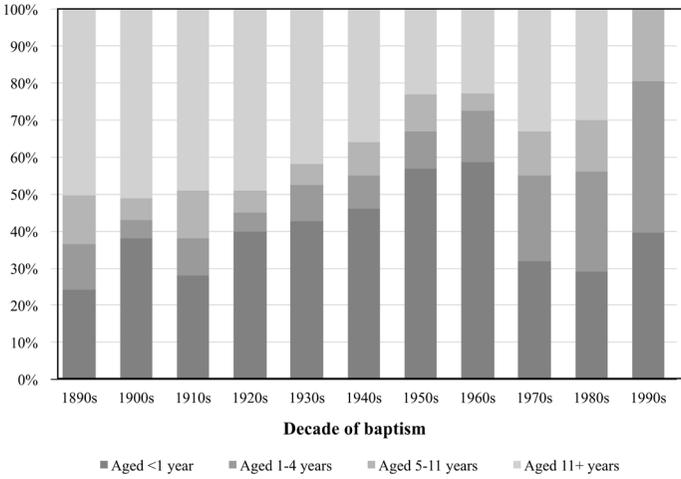


FIGURE 2.5 Age Profile of New Baptisms in the Tanzanian Parishes (Source: MHDD; see Walters 2008)

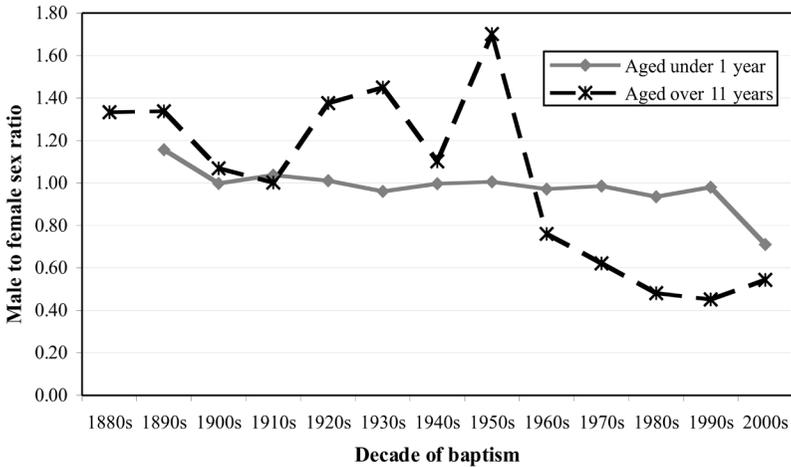


FIGURE 2.6 Adult and Infant Sex Ratios of New Baptisms in the Tanzanian Parishes (Source: MHDD; see Walters 2008)

proportion of male baptisms is at odds with observations that have been made elsewhere of a female bias in colonial African Christianity (Hodgson 2005). Hodgson describes ‘a significant paradox of the missionary endeavour in many parts of Africa . . . as the preponderance of female adherents to Christianity despite concerted efforts by most mainstream missionary groups to convert men’ (2005: 1).

One wonders if the export-oriented nature of the cotton market in Sukumaland could have led more men to seek affiliation with the church than in other areas, given their increased interaction with the colonial state (Austen 1968). This hypothesis would also explain the particular rise in male adherence in the 1950s, during the Sukumaland development scheme and the period of political activism in Mwanza prior to independence (Iliffe 1979).

The first century of a new church is clearly therefore one of significant instability in the composition of the congregation. Sixfold increases/decreases in the numbers of new converts can occur in the space of a decade, the proportion of new baptisms to adults can halve and the sex ratio of new adult baptisms can reverse (Figures 2.4–2.6). These effects are not random and can be explained by the wider historical context. Taken together with the individual-level descriptions of reasons for moving in and out of the church in conversion narratives, and the priests' diary accounts of the mission's relation with the wider population, a picture can be drawn of the likely censoring and compositional effects in each parish. Accounting for those censoring effects statistically should be achieved at the parish level, given that variability was so dependent on the local context.

The description thus far of categorization, censoring and composition has rested to a large degree on the use of missionary sources. It is clear that missionary attitudes and motivations need to be considered in reading those sources, and we also need to consider the mission's changing attitude over time. Just as local perceptions of the mission changed over the twentieth century and Christianity shifted from an exotic creed to the established norm, so the attitude of missionaries to local practice changed, from one of censure and intrigue to one of syncretism and respect. These changing attitudes affect what is recorded both in the parish registers and more widely in the historical documentation, and it is examined below.

### **Conjuncture, Construal and Change**

I was sitting with about twenty medical students from the Malawi College of Medicine in a large round room in the Kungoni Centre for Arts and Culture at Mua Mission, central Malawi. They were from a mixture of backgrounds: some Chewa, some Yao, some Ngoni and some from neighbouring countries. We could hear the rustle of costumes as the dancers prepared themselves in the wings, and while

we waited, we listened to the missionary priest, telling us about the meaning of the Chewa *gule wamkulu* and Ngoni dances we were about to see. This priest is a White Father who has lived in Malawi since the 1960s, working as a missionary, artist and anthropologist. At the Chamare Museum in the Kungoni Centre, he has assembled the world's largest collection of *gule wamkulu* masks and the museum is described to tourists as 'the finest ethnographic museum in Malawi' (Briggs and Bartlett 2010: 127). He was explaining to the students the Chewa *mwambo*, the traditional moral code and teachings about how to become and be a responsible and honourable Chewa.

Historically, the Mua Mission was not intent on preserving Chewa culture. Indeed, the battle between the Catholic missionaries at Mua and the secret *nyau* societies of the Chewa is well-documented (Linden and Linden 1974; Kachipila 2006). Frequent campaigns were launched by the missionaries to stop the dances and to outlaw the secret society; being *nyau* was seen as incompatible with being Catholic.<sup>8</sup> In turn, early twentieth-century *gule wamkulu* characters mocked the mission, and *nyau* pitted themselves against priests to gain control over Chewa souls in transitional moments such as birth and death (Linden and Linden 1974; Boucher et al. 2012). As I listened to the Malawian (including Chewa) medical students asking the priest questions about their own history and traditions, and to their professor thanking him for his work preserving their culture and artefacts, I reflected on the great shift the church has made from cultural colonialist to conservator of customs. It was a shift that occurred all over Catholic Africa, and similar institutions housing ethnographic and historical artefacts and documents have been established by White Fathers in Zambia (e.g. the Faith and Encounter Cultural Centre (FENZA)) and Tanzania (e.g. the Sukuma Museum at Bujora). The shift began in the 1950s and in particular following the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s, which laid the foundation for 'inculturation': the policy of relating Catholic teachings, symbolism and values to traditional teachings and culture, and promoting syncretism (Hastings 1990). David Clement (one of the founders of the Sukuma Museum) described the extent of this attitudinal (and policy) change:

When all this started some twenty years ago, it was a revolution; and it required a lot of courage on the part of the pioneers to conduct that peaceful and religious revolution at a time when nobody imagined that the beating of a drum could be as pious as the sound of an organ,

and what today everybody considers normal was at that time condemned by short-sighted persons as irreligious and even too profane for a Christian to even consider. This research team (Chama cha St. Cecilia) of the Sukuma Museum was created naturally from the desire to utilize African features in an African context; that is the Sukuma Christian should not feel strange in his own Christian church, he should not be obliged to renounce at any time his legitimate taste, habits, the beauty of his environment or the skills of his artisans . . . These [Sukuma dance] societies do not only deal with dance but also with the cult of the ancestors. Everything being so meshed it was a very delicate task for the researchers, who are devout Christians to investigate their origins, history, and development without being denounced by their fellow Christians of apostasy. (Clement 1977)

This changing church attitude to African culture has implications for censoring in the parish registers, but the direction of effect is unclear. It is to be expected that growing openness to and integration with customary practice would make the parish registers increasingly representative and sensitive over time. However, as described above, earlier missionaries were so intent on censoring customary practice that they actually kept quite detailed records on transgressions of Catholic codes in their *status animarum*. This is certainly true in relation to marriage. It is perhaps less true in relation to other demographic events, which were marked differently by Catholic and customary celebrations of being and becoming. Where conceptions of the life course differed, events of significance to the reproductive lives of parishioners (vital junctures) might be missed. For example, in many traditional African societies a newborn was not considered fully present in the world until a certain period of danger had passed. In Mua, people traditionally kept their infants enclosed in the hut for the first couple of months of life, until the child could smile or display other signs of growth and strength (van Breugel and Ott 2001). At that point, the infant would be brought out of the hut and a naming ceremony conducted to officially welcome the child into the world. If the child were to die before that time, he or she was not given a funeral or burial in the same way as would a 'full' human being. The treatment of newborns as on-loan spirit beings until that point conflicts with the practice of infant baptism in the church, and it is likely that the mortality of many of the newborns was missed if they died prior to their naming ceremony. Over time, naming ceremonies became less common and baptism more so, but determining exact dates of this shift to allow for censoring is difficult.

Other important moments of becoming and growth missed historically by the church are the male and female initiation ceremonies in which a person's passage to adulthood (and reproductive life) was marked. If we had a record of these ceremonies, it would be a more meaningful start date for the observation of fertility histories than the date of Catholic marriage. They are in that sense conjunctural moments, and ones that were not merely missed by the church, but actively censured (Varkevisser 1973). In Mua (Malawi), missionary diarists complained frequently about the initiation ceremonies because of what they considered improper and immoral teachings, and in Sukumaland (Tanzania), missionaries tried to close the huts where young people lived during initiation (Cory 1953: 39–40). Over time, the church changed its attitude, increasingly coming to understand that these ceremonies could be used as a conduit for moral teachings. Today initiation ceremonies are conducted with a Catholic blessing and some control. For example, at the White Fathers' Faith and Encounter Centre in Lusaka, Zambia, the church provides a hall and a priest for the ceremonies. There remains no record of these events in the standard parish books, but the growing harmonization between the Catholic and customary life course and the confluence between the Catholic and customary construal around reproduction and demographic conjuncture determines the extent of overlap of the occurrence and measurement circles in the moral demography framework.

The spread of Christianity in Africa was a process of negotiation and conversation between mission and people (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991). At the heart of that conversation was debate over moral codes of becoming: traditional religion and Christianity presented parallel and competing (sometimes conflicting) ideologies of honour and growth. Both described a moral life course and celebrated its proper passage while censuring deviance. Prior to Vatican II, these ideologies were presented as incompatible. People were asked to choose between the two, and markers of growth and being that had importance in one worldview were not necessarily celebrated in the other. In reality, people lived (and still live) between the two worlds, veering from mission to custom depending on the context.

Even today, most people who marry in church are already married according to customary law. I was staying at Mua Parish in June 2012 when marriage ceremonies were taking place. I spent one evening sitting at the long hardwood table in the dining room with the three parish priests filling in the forms for the eighty

couples who were staying in the parish hall preparing for their wedding ceremonies the following day. I was in charge of the parish stamp and, as I stamped, I chatted to the priests about the couples in the hall. Nearly all had children with them and nearly all had been married in their village for the last couple of years. The priests spoke of the difficulty of translating the traditional Catholic marriage teachings into the local context, accounting for the fact that these couples already knew a great deal about the realities of married life. The Catholic marriage was not the true marker of that transition and clearly there are implications for demography: using this marriage date is likely to underestimate marital fertility, unless great care is taken to specify the population in observation and ensure the exclusion of people who were already married according to customary law. One option is to identify those subpopulations as far as possible and to create upper and lower bounds for demographic estimates. For example, in calculating marriage age, we might compare the age at Catholic wedding for couples baptized as children to the age at first birth for all women minus nine months (signifying the start of customary marriage) (Walters 2008: Chapter 4).

From a moral demography perspective, the myriad modes of being and belonging in modern Africa affect not only our measurement tools and categories, but also the construal through which decisions were taken and demographic action took place. As described above, Johnson-Hanks' definition of 'construal' is 'the actor's interpretation of, and engagement with, the conjuncture in the form of demographically relevant action'. Interpretation and engagement are determined by predispositions and 'these predispositions are the product of our past experiences, which took place in a social world of people who themselves had similarly structured predispositions' (Johnson-Hanks 2007: 15–16). In thinking about twentieth-century African society, with its growing missionary church, it is not certain that we can talk about 'structured predispositions'. We might instead talk of re-structured dispositions or, better still, continuous making and unmaking of dispositions, for both local people and for the missionaries, through whose eyes we are reading of change. Keeping track of that re-structuring must underlie the use and interpretation of church records for historical demography in the region if censoring and compositional effects are to be accurately processed.

## Conclusion/Reflection

After spending the evening stamping marriage certificates, I sat the next morning outside Mua church watching the wedding parties mount the steps. The brides were dressed in white, wearing veils and carrying bright bunches of plastic flowers. Their Catholic marriage was a rite of passage in their lives and an important signifier of their identity as modern women, yet they were not the only marker or the only identity. While I watched, I remembered earlier interactions at Mua: a missionary describing the privilege of being present at important transitional moments in people's lives and another missionary teaching the Chewa *mwambo* (moral code) to modern Chewa medical students. The passion and care with which White Father missionaries followed their converts and documented their lives bode well for historical demography, but we have seen here how that passion changed over time, and the shifts in recording (e.g. through personnel change, expansion of the population or the increasing employment of parish clerks) affect the quality of data in ways that must be accounted for in analysis. The fact that priests at Mua (and at FENZA and Bujora)<sup>9</sup> are now presenting back to local people their own customs, traditions and codes of honour, having spent much of the early to mid twentieth century working hard to intervene and change those moral codes, shows that hegemonic effects are by no means linear. Rather, negotiation between priests and people about faith, morality, modernity and its expression through family organization and sexual practice were myriad and reciprocal in twentieth-century Africa.

Undoubtedly, the church affected the way in which people managed their reproductive and family lives, and certainly this means that parish register data are unrepresentative of wider, non-Christian populations. In turn, the ways in which being, becoming and belonging were conceptualized both by local people and by their priests and missionaries – and the ways in which those conceptualizations changed over time – lead to compositional and censoring effects in the parish registers. African parish registers cannot be used for demographic reconstruction without acknowledging and exploring these effects and relationships. Family reconstitution alone will not yield accurate results. A willingness to go beyond reconstitution into the messy realm of qualitative analysis, and beyond demography into the anthropology of religion and family, and the patience to collect not only demographic events but also markers of presence and 'religiosity'<sup>10</sup> will however yield something richer than a simple

reconstruction of demographic rates. It will permit an understanding of how construal shifts over the *longue durée*, how hegemonic models feed and grow in the context of colonialism, modernization and an expanding church, and the impact on how people organize and manage their reproductive lives.

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### Notes

1. The Counting Souls Project is a Wellcome Trust-funded research programme based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, [WT095724/Z/11/Z]. The objective is to reconstruct the demographic histories of nine Catholic parishes in East and Central Africa.
2. The White Fathers are so-called because of the white robes they originally wore when they were founded in Algiers in the nineteenth century. The society is now officially called the Missionaries of Africa, but they are still colloquially known as the White Fathers, and that is how they are referred to throughout this chapter.

3. The Tanzanian parish data (from Bukumbi, Bugando, Kome Island and Kagunguli) were earlier inputted into the Mwanza Historical Demographic Database, as featured in figures in this chapter. The registers in all parishes remain in use today.
4. Likoma was not eventually included in the Counting Souls database.
5. See, for example, Mua Parish diary, 1 January 1952: 'We now have 6,140 baptised Christians, 1,579 families; 639 of these are broken marriages. Only 2,100 of our 3,324 adults are allowed to receive the sacraments; 2/5ths of our parishioners never receive communion. Out of a total of 2,516 children and youngsters, 750 are illegitimate, from adulterous liaisons'.
6. Many of these baptisms in danger of death were conducted in clinics and health posts, and not always with the patient's knowledge or consent. They are usually but not always identified with the letters 'i.a.m – in articulo mortis'. Later, a separate register was established for the baptism of those in danger of death, making them easier to identify and exclude from analysis.
7. See also Chilubula diary, 1 September 1907.
8. Indeed, the mission at Mua tried repeatedly to abolish the *nyau* and the *gule wamkulu*, and made representation to the colonial authorities to that end. In October 1946, the District Commissioner ordered the people of Mua: 'when you want to dance your nyau, do it in one place, in a place where there is no school of the mission, in a place where there are no Christians, when you want to dance go far far, kutali uko! Kutalindithu! [that is far! Very far!]' (translated by Fr. Claude Boucher).
9. The Faith and Encounter Cultural Centre (FENZA) in Lusaka, Zambia and the Sukuma Museum at Bujora, Mwanza, Tanzania are research centres, archives and museums of local culture founded by the White Fathers, similar to the Kungoni Centre for Culture and Art and the Kafukufuku research centre at Mua.
10. Church attendance and payment of tithes, missionary notes on character, etc.

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