Recontextualizing faith:

Towards a non-reductionistic missiology in northern Tanzania.

Asle F. Jøssang

Asle F. Jøssang, 1956. PhD in Social Anthropology, University of Oslo. Associate professor, Intercultural Studies, NLA University College. Former NLM missionary to Peru and Bolivia. Asle F. Jøssang, 1956. PhD i sosialantropologi fra Universistetet i Oslo. Førsteamanuensis i Interkulturelle studier ved NLA Høgskolen. Tidligere misjonær for NLM i Peru og Bolivia.

Abstract

I 1950 overtok Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband et felt i nordre Tanzania som bød på stor etnisk, språklig og kulturell variasjon. En standardisert misjonspraksis som ikke gjorde forskjell på folkegruppene, førte like fullt til forskjellige resultater blant gruppene. I dag er den lutherske kirken i Mbulu-området dominert av én gruppe, mens andre er stadig å regne som hovedsakelig «unådde». Denne artikkelen er en antropologisk belysning av hvorfor spesielt kvegfolket Datoga vendte ryggen til kirken og dens budskap. Polygami-spørsmålet har vært det primære ankepunktet. Nå som kirken forsøker å få ny kontakt med Datoga-folket på en kultursensitiv måte, kan det være fruktbart å kontekstualisere deres kulturpraksis i full bredde og se på gamle stridsspørsmål i nytt lys.

Introduction

A Lutheran mission field in Mbulu in northern Tanzania, opened in 1939 by a Swedish organization and transferred to the Norwegian Lutheran Mission in 1950, happened to be situated in a unique area in Africa. It was, in fact, the only location where the four language families on the continent; Nilotic, Cushitic, Bantu, and Khoisan, met.[1] Despite facing a variety of languages, livelihoods, and cultural customs, the mission pursued a uniform missiological practice meant to reach "all peoples for Christ". It was not concerned with accommodating to local diversities. Nevertheless, the work evolved differently in the various groups. This situation lends itself to explore and reflect on the interdynamics between socio-cultural, material, and spiritual matters.

The short version of the Mbulu story is that the Lutheran mission, and later the nationalized church, evolved in a context in which the smallest and the largest ethnic groups switched positions. The Cushitic-speaking Iraqw became the dominant group in society and in the church, while the Nilotic-speaking Datoga became increasingly marginalized. Only recently have the Datoga been

"rediscovered" as an "unreached people group".

The ethnic alteration was an unexpected and unintended development that, as I will suggest in this article, may be explained by applying the analytical concept of reductionism. Reductionism is to ignore the multiplicity of a phenomenon by reducing it to a single level of interest or analysis. One aspect of the phenomenon becomes the overriding issue, to the point of shutting out other dimensions that might be equally real and important to developments, if considered from other points of view.[2]

From the mission's point of view, local social and cultural features and variations coalesced into a generalized, single category representing "heathenism". This approach effectively decontextualized human behaviour from the general socio-cultural and material embeddedness in which all societal phenomena are situated. The consequence of such reductionism was to disguise the full picture of why some people approached the church while others refrained from doing so.

I will suggest that a reason why the Iraqw embraced Christianity in much larger numbers was that it was relatively easy for them to adjust their socio-cultural institutions to the new ways of living that the church expected. The opposite was the case with most Datoga, where, as we will see, the major problem was the issue of polygamy. Traditionalist Datoga effectively felt unwelcome in the church because it did not accept polygamy.

Today, the Lutheran church wishes to practice a so-called "culturally sensitive" approach in its renewed efforts to reach the Datoga. How deep and far-reaching that sensitivity should go is currently subject to discussion. My intention is not to partake in that debate, but rather to use the case to explore what kind of data a social anthropological perspective can throw into the missiological deliberation. Anthropology is not new to missiology, but even this discipline can easily slip into a reductionistic mode if it becomes mainly concerned with cultural meaning and morality in the Geertzian sense.[3] To give the Datoga polygamy complex and the people who practice it fair consideration, we need to understand the phenomenon more broadly in its multiple social, cultural and material dimensions.

A common concern for people everywhere is to seek social and economically viable lives within available means and circumstances. Even if a socio-cultural structure should need to change, it may require time, and will depend on a compound set of variables. Our ways of attaining social and economic ends may be acceptably "Christian", but a reminder of the fact that they are not solely a result of theological

conditioning ought to help us empathize with the struggles that others may have in aligning ideals and practices.

A multi-faceted context

Previous accounts of mission and church in Mbulu have all been written by practising missionaries that, not surprisingly, have been normatively structured according to the theological imperative for being there.[4] The narratives tend to position the mission/church as the primary agent of initiatives and actions, and with local populations as recipients of those efforts. Data on country, history, politics, and people groups have mostly served as descriptive background material with no apparent connection to the evolvement of the church. Positive outcomes are featured as "God's work", while negative or bewildering results are not mentioned at all, or implied to be due to demonic interferences.[5]

What we need is to see the integrated scenario that emerges when different dimensions of society are dynamically connected. Social anthropology provides such a view. The interconnections manifest themselves in the multi-dimensionality of human activity. A society organizes itself in relation to the material conditions at hand, such as natural resources and technology. Culture, referring here specifically to the dimension in life that is about knowledge and understanding, provides the rational for how people go about their lives as they do. Any given social institution, that is; a habituated way of doing something, is multi-functional. It addresses a primary purpose while simultaneously attending to others too as social, political, economic, religious and other purposes and interests intertwine. This is the case, as we shall see, with the polygamous institution.

Social action theory[6] helps us to appreciate how unfolding events more often than not are actions set in motion by purpose-driven actors and entities. Added to this is the multiple narrative or multiple protagonist perspective,[7] which portrays all participating agents as active protagonists unto themselves; initiating actions, or trying to enhance or secure their respective prospects in the response to the evolving scenarios. In this light, the mission/church is but one "actor" among many, others being the government, local chiefs etc. The purpose of this take on things is not to contest the theological understanding of the agency of missio Dei, but to situate it within a larger framework.[8]

Ethnic reconstruction efforts

When the European colonizers; the Germans at the turn of the 20th century followed by the British in 1920, came to Mbulu, they walked straight into what, to them, was a classic case of the cultural theoryin vogue at the time; evolutionary hierarchization of culture.[9] In the Yaeda valley, they encountered the Khoisan-speaking Hadzabe, who, as hunter-gatherers, were positioned at the bottom of the scale. The dominant and most widely spread group were the Nilotic speaking Datoga, placed in the middle range. In the middle because they were semi-nomadic pastoralists, but fell short of the "most civilized" group found in the highlands, the Cushitic speaking Iraqw, who were settled agro-pastoralists.

The incoming Europeans endeared themselves to the Iraqw. For quite some time, the Iraqw were classified as "Hamitic" and as such exemplified the European-generated racial myths of the Hamitic being fairly advanced to the point of being "half-Europeans".[10] The fact that they practiced agriculture was "proof" of their advanced state compared to the other ethnic groups.

The Iraqw have a long history of being open-minded, innovative and pragmatic.[11] Occasional conflicts and even violent clashes with groups such as the Maasai and the Datoga, never ruled out interethnic contact. Most of the famous Iraqw ritual leaders and medicine men were, in fact, originally migrants from neighbouring groups such as the Isanzu (Bantu-speakers) and the Datoga.[12] The Iraqw have never essentialized notions of Iraqw cultural and religious purity, but have instead allowed for social inclusion based on permitting people to settle in their territory and to participate in ritual practice.[13] This has facilitated the pragmatic absorption of influences from others based on whatever "works".

The Iraqw accommodated themselves fairly easily to the new administrative arrangements introduced by the European colonialists, such as the introduction of chieftainship. Instead of flatly opposing this new structure, which challenged the horizontal leadership arrangement of clan elders, medicine men and ritual leaders, the Iraqw found a way to combine the two spheres in a mutually beneficial way. The government-appointed chief Mikaeli Ahho (in 1925) and the prominent medicine man Nade Bea developed an impressive working relationship.[14] The British administrators would frequently consult with the medicine man before embarking on new projects.[15] Nade Bea rationalized and cushioned the foreign incursions in ways that the Iraqw understood.

The Datoga, in contrast, proved to be quite stubborn and elusive. Their worldview was firmly embedded in conceptions of fertility, in which ancestor worship and notions of ritual purity administered by ritual leaders, were essential.[16] This left little and no room for accommodating compromises to foreign things. The colonial introduction of chieftainship was considered to be a direct affront to traditional leadership, and was notoriously undermined. At one point, the British discovered Datoga elders' tactic of nominating weak candidates for the office of chieftainship, whom they could manipulate and control at will.[17] Also, to avoid taxation and schooling of their children, the Datoga would typically move their camps to inaccessible areas.

Some infamous Datoga customs provoked the civilizing sensibilities of the Europeans, and produced fear among neighbouring groups. Raids of cattle stealing was a continuous problem, not to speak of the lilichta custom whereby a Datoga youth was expected to prove himself socially by killing a big wild animal, or alternatively, a person from another ethnic group. The Datoga developed a reputation for being "murderers", and were frequently described as "the murdering tribe" in missionary reports as well.[18] The European discourse produced an imagery of the Datoga as being particularly "unruly, barbaric and backward".[19] Besides, British colonial policy did not consider pastoralism to be a worthwhile economic system in its own right but should, in the least, be combined with agriculture.[20]

In 1935, after realizing that their efforts to control and change the Datoga were failing, the British embarked upon a new strategy called the "amalgamation policy".[21] The new plan was to encourage Iraqw agriculturalists to spread out from their traditional territory in the Mbulu highland and to settle in Datoga areas. Some ethnic mixing had already been taking place leading to an increase in mixed marriages, and some Datoga who lived in close proximity to Iraqw were settling and starting to adopt agriculture. The British hoped that an increased spreading-out of Iraqw settlers would have a "pacifying" effect on the Datoga.

A church amidst ethnic competition.

Dongobesh, the area where the Swedish Evangelical Mission Society (Evangeliska Forsterlands-Stiftelsen) established its mission station in 1939, happened to be one of those frontier territories into which the government encouraged the Iraqw to migrate. For several decades, it had been the territory of the Gisamjanga clan of the Datoga. The British had in fact installed a rich cattle owner, Gitagano Falla, as "chief of the

Gisamjanga" in 1927.[22] This was in line with the policy of Indirect rule, designed to both ease the administration of local populations and also to implement the regulation mandated by the League of Nations of protecting the interests of the natives.[23]

It was chief Gitagano who invited the Swedish mission to come to Dongobesh. During the coming years, while the Swedes were busy establishing their mission station, dramatic socio-political changes took place in the area. Iraqw immigration was a success. The British administration was clearly content with the fact that Iraqw settlers was soon the majority population because they had become increasingly frustrated with the uncooperative and "unruly" behaviour of chief Gitagano.[24]

"Respecting the interests of the natives" was subject to increasingly patronizing interpretations and creative strategies of implementation. In 1943, the British District Commissioner orchestrated a baraza in which Gitagano Falla was removed from office –by "popular demand". The people present decided that Dongobesh should henceforth be fully recognized as falling under the jurisdiction of the Iraqw chief in Mbulu.[25]

The people with whom the mission in Dongobesh got in contact were mainly Iraqw settlers. The Iraqw responded by sending their children to the new school and attended church services. The first baptisms were conducted in August 1941, all of them being Iraqw.[26] While appalled by their "heathen" ways, the Swedes nevertheless quickly developed a special liking for this people group, finding the Iraqw "easy-going and open-minded".[27] Probably in view of the dynamic flow of things, the missionaries chose Iraqw as the language for starting an alphabetization and Bible translation project. This committed their attention even further towards the Iraqw.

Traditionalist Datoga moved on to other areas with their livestock. The major impediment for joining the church was the issue of polygamy, to which we will return later in this article. The few Datoga who entered the church had become assimilated with the Iraqw through intermarriage, had left pastoralism for various reasons, or were women in polygamous marriages.

Endearment towards the Iraqw is not to say that the Swedish mission deliberately discriminated against the Datoga. In fact, from a very early point they planned for their next mission station to be localized in the heartland of the Barabaig clan of the Datoga on the eastern side of Mt. Hanang.[28] This plan, however, came to nothing due to lack of resources, and the area was eventually "lost" to Roman Catholic incursion.

A decisive premise for the missionaries' work was to commend their plans and efforts to divine guidance. Naturally, all positive openings and responses were subsequently interpreted and represented in that light. The growing presence of one ethnic group within the church was never problematized in any way, but rather eclipsed by the joyful imagery of witnessing how the church benches were being filled by "souls" in need of salvation.

In Dongobesh, Iraqw converts continued to take hold of the church. The political side-lining of the Datoga Gisamjanga clan staged by the British administration, the dwindling presence of traditionalists in the area, and the pragmatic accommodation and assimilation of the remaining Gisamjanga to Iraqw ways, contributed towards developing a church; originally meant for "all people", into one largely filled by one ethnic group.

Taking over the field in 1950, the Norwegian Lutheran Mission hoped to commit even further to Dongobesh by building a small hospital there.[29] The British administration eventually turned down this application, and suggested instead that NLM consider setting up medical service in the arid Haydom area some 50 km to the southwest.

Datoga pastoralists had abandoned this bush land some years earlier because it had become infested with the feared tsetse fly. Now that the area been subject to a clearing campaign, the government decided the opportunity now presented itself for encouraging agricultural settlement.[30] The D.C. reckoned that provision of medical services would embolden people to move into the area.

Sceptical at first, but also encouraged by the notion that God must be behind such an unexpected and challenging proposition, NLM accepted. Construction started in 1953, and the new hospital opened for attention in January 1955.

This move brought the mission once again into a borderline situation where ethnic groups competed for space and influence. Iraqw settlers, who sought employment at the hospital, or started small businesses and auxiliary services in the fast-expanding village, soon dominated Haydom. Some Datoga also gradually settled in Haydom. An informant comments on a mixture of strategies and motives among the Datoga for settling in Haydom: Most were "modernists", resourceful and creative entrepreneurs who sought education and new opportunities in the "modern world". Some people were allocated to Haydom as representatives of their extended families being deliberate strategies to complement the traditional pastoralist way of life and increase their families' total means. Others found themselves in opposite situations, escaping from failures in the pastoralist economy.

Issues about social, economic, and political viability had shaping effects on the various life careers, including whether to join the church. Traditionalist Datoga stayed away. Somewhat romanticised explanations such as "conservatism", "love for cattle", and "cultural pride" have often been offered as reasons, but they only see certain parts of a complex socio-cultural system.[31] Raising a big herd of livestock is indeed the Datoga youth's biggest dream; but the larger the herd, the greater become the commitments, responsibilities, and the expectations from others that will tie him to the cattle complex.

The marriage system, operationalized through both bride price and dowry, is the means of building alliances across clans. This is inextricably tied to the exchange and circulation of livestock as the modus operandi. Polygamy doubles as a means of building up a viable pool of hands to attend to the increasing logistic needs of handling livestock. With every new wife comes more manpower, and an additional circuit of mutual obligations and interests tied to one's flock of cattle.[32]

A Datoga elder comments that young men who are due to inherit large herds of livestock "know" the church is not for them since they will eventually need to become polygamists. A widespread imagery among Datoga pastoralists is that the church is for the "weak" people who have failed at pastoralism and have nothing to lose.

Much like Dongobesh before it, the parish in Haydom developed into one largely attended by Iraqw settlers. Baptism records for the period 1961 to 1971 show that 455 adult Iraqw were baptized during this period, as against 75 adult Datoga. The ratio of children is about the same.[33]

In 1961, the year Tanganyika got its independence, the Norwegian mission field was formally organized as an independent church bearing the name Iraqw Lutheran Church. Commenting on the ethnic choice of name, a leading Iraqw pastor says the name was not a deliberate demonstration of ethnic dominance. Rather, it reflected the demographic reality within the church. The minority Datoga members, "many of them having effectively become Iraqw, anyway, never protested about the name", he said. Nor, does it seem, was the ethnic specification ever an issue with the missionaries.

In June 1963, the Iraqw church was integrated into the national Evangelical Luthe-

ran Church of Tanzania, and changed its name to the Mbulu synod of ELCT. It became a diocese in 1994.

That same year, the old Datoga field around Mt. Hanang was transferred from the diocese in Singida to Mbulu. By now, however, the demographic composition of the area had shifted dramatically. Small towns and permanent villages had become populated mainly by Iraqw migrants and some

"modernized" Datoga. Encroaching agriculturalists had continuously pushed traditional pastoralists into arid outskirt areas. The Tanzanian government had not discouraged this influx. On the contrary, agriculture was featured as key to development, and the pivotal expression of this was when the government handed over vast grazing lands between Basotu and Mt. Hanang to a Canadian wheat scheme project.[34]

The ethnic composition of the Lutheran parishes in the Hanang area repeated the pattern previously seen in Dongobesh and in Haydom. Traditional Datoga men abstained as the foremost obstacle was still the inflexible position on polygamy. Then there are numerous stories about Datoga women who did not feel welcome in church wearing their traditional hanang'wenda skirts; - some even being stopped at the entrance by the local pastor. Many narratives of this kind are probably exaggerated, but the point is that they have served to keep alive a perception of a church that is not on the side of traditional Datoga.

"Our wazee (old ones) tell that they never felt welcome in the church. The sense of being unwelcome spread among our people. They felt that they were always looked down on as chafu (dirty). Nobody ever asked about whether the Datoga had anything good and valuable in their way of life that would be worth preserving", says an informant, who left the church years ago when he, out of practical necessity, took on more wives.

The disguising effect of reductionism.

A rather curious development took place in the Mbulu church. Even as it became dominated by the Iraqw the church nevertheless seemed less and less "ethnic". In its daily practice, one could hardly find any symbolic display of Iraqwness. Instead, "Christian" symbols would increasingly take over as they also merged with national aesthetic expressions associated with the "modern" Tanzania; sometimes characterized as "becoming a Swahili" in reference to the national language.

The invisibilization of ethnicity came about because of the two processes of reductionism; one theological and the other political, that took place simultaneously.

The theological reductionism manifested itself in the way the Lutheran mission related to people mainly in terms of a single normative category; of souls needing salvation. On this basis, all people were treated equally irrespective of what they might otherwise also be. Apart from the question of indigenous language, which was dealt with in a positivistic sense of translating the same message to everyone present, there are no signs in policy documents nor in reports about the concern of accommodating mission practice to local culture and ethnicity.

On the political side, the strong anti-ethnic ideology of the first president of independent Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, set a nationalistic tone across the country. Nyerere visited Haydom in 1967 to inaugurate the new extension of the hospital. He is remembered for his stern speech in which he admonished some Datoga women, who sat in the crowd wearing their traditional skirts, for being a

"disgrace" to the development of Tanzania. The church leadership got the message. Informants tell of how displays of anything "tribal" was increasingly looked down upon. The ethnic label would eventually be dropped from baptismal records. One pastor explains that a continuation of the old practice was seen as "bad taste". Some church leaders were ambiguous about supporting Bible translation projects in the Iraqw and Datoga languages.

Ethnicity is not a given category, but a phenomenon that may arise when a group of people needs to create boundaries between itself and others in order to protect one's interests or for other purposes. Something particular and useful in one's cultural repertoire; language, religion, history, aesthetic articulations etc., is employed as marker of differentiation. Strength of inner cohesion and sharpness of boundaries are relative to the necessities and interests at stake.[35]

In traditional societies, necessities in the social, economic realms are organized and secured along lines of kinship and networks of social relations in which commitment and loyalty is crucial. In Tanzania at the time, state apparatus, depersonalized bureaucratic systems, and market economy were not sufficiently in place to substitute for the needs and functions that were handled traditionally. Even if the state's heavy anti-ethnic rhetoric challenged ethnic articulations and sentiments, it could not provide viable alternatives to securing material needs. People needed each other as before and organized their needs along the proven networks. Nyerere's socialist-inspired Ujamaa villagization scheme did not erase traditional means of dependency as the new village units more often than not coincided with existing ethnic groups. The new dynamic that emerged was for ethnic sentiments to transfer to, and thus disguise themselves in new modes of articulation.

From semiotics we know that signs and symbols are arbitrary in that attributed meanings can shift from old to new ones. In Mbulu, people continued to depend on ethnically organized means of meeting daily needs even if they had become Christians and joined the church. While converts projected themselves in new, Christian and supposedly non-ethnic ways, ethnic-based organization did not disappear. Some compromises and new arrangements of behaviour towards their non-converted kinfolk could produce awkward and difficult situations, but converts were rarely chased away from the community. This was because they continued to represent vital resources to their kinsfolk.

"Invisibilization" of ethnicity was operationalized by means of symbolic reductionism. Conversion, and the expected maturing of the converts' faith and witness as disciples of Christ, were articulated by projecting a set of symbols associated with the converted state of a "new life in Christ". These were necessarily contrasted to the signs associated with the pre-converted state commonly labelled as

"heathenism", which, in effect, equalled traditional "ethnic" signs. New codes of behaviour, dress, and the name-change practice of taking a new Biblical name at baptism, were introduced through the embodied example of the mission staff. An informant recalls his father telling how the first Christians watched carefully how things were to be done.

The symbolic dichotomization served a pedagogical and psychological purpose in helping the new converts find their bearings in the new mode of behaviour that implied "turning one's back to the Devil and his worldly ways". This new outlook on life was slowly implanted and popularized by means such as the song "Msalaba mbele, dunia nyuma" (The cross in front, the world behind). Christian progress and social positioning within the new community were relative to distancing oneself from traditional ethnic symbols. Older informants recall their need for confirming their new identities as Christians by projecting themselves "correctly" and receive positive feedback from missionaries and church elders. Feedback was not necessarily in the

form of outright verbal commentary, but through being assigned tasks in church.

From time to time, the negative imagery of the traditionalist Datoga even reached national attention. The government was bent on eliminating pastoralism, and attempted to force the Datoga into agrarian "development". In 1970, the Datoga were chased out of thousands of acres of grazing land on the Basotu plains located between Haydom and Mt. Hanang, and the area was converted into a large- scale wheat farming scheme. The military was sent in to try to force Datoga to settle in *ujamaa*-villages and have their children attend school. The last reported case of the infamous *lilichta* killing ritual took place in 1976.[36] The lingering imagery of "barbaric tribesmen" was reproduced with the news of recurring violent clashes taking place with encroaching agriculturalists, such as when frustrated Datoga warriors ambushed and killed 48 Sukuma men in 1985. [37]

Polygamy continued to be a major point of contention between the Datoga and the church. The mission, followed afterwards by the church, ruled that polygamists who wanted to be baptized should officially marry one wife, yet continue to honour the social and economic upkeep of the other women.[38] With this, one hoped that polygamy would gradually disappear. After all, this was what was happening to the Iraqw, so it was assumed that the same would be the case with the Datoga. As it did not, "stubborn" Datoga ended yet again on the losing side of things.

Here we see theological reductionism at work. Failing to situate a phenomenon in a larger, multi-faceted context, it risks overlooking aspects that might be important to the people concerned. In this case, one failed to see and consider that polygamy among agriculturalists was different from pastoralists. Among the Iraqw, polygamy was more of a prestige issue for rich farmers holding enough land to sustain larger households. Being more of a surplus phenomenon, it gradually disappeared as pressure on land increased. In pastoralist Datoga society, however, polygamy lies at the heart of the socio-economic complex, being a crucial means of ensuring a viable management of increasing herds of livestock and building networks and alliances. In-laws and other partners have economic stakes in a Datoga man's herd, which would have to be returned to the provider if the relationship ceases.

Reflecting on the situation of his people during the past decades, a Datoga elder commented bitterly: "What is this thing called maendeleo (development)? For us, things have always gone from bad to worse. We have never experienced anyone being on our side. Nobody has ever tried to understand us. Not the government. Not the church."

To the degree the church has been able to reach traditionalist Datoga, it has mostly been among women. The church has always allowed women in polygamous marriages to become baptized even if they continue in their traditional marriages. Most women who have converted and become baptized do not live with their husbands, yet they seldom divorce. This is a discrete way of handling the conjugal conflicts that conversion of one of the spouses easily generates, yet avoid severing alliance relations and subsequent return of livestock, which divorce would eventually entail. Also, women would have to give up their children if they divorce.[39]

New efforts towards the Datoga

As several missionaries and Tanzanian church leaders in Mbulu have pointed out in interviews, it has never been the intention of the Lutheran church to marginalize any group. "The Gospel is intended for all peoples", commented a retired pastor. During our conversation, however, he also said that "God does not distinguish between people, and our efforts to reach people have thus to be uniform". According to him, traditionalist Datoga were themselves to blame for their marginalization by

sticking "stubbornly" to their ways.

In recent years, the Lutheran church in Mbulu has started to realize that the traditionalist Datoga have largely remained an unreached people. The few who have converted and entered the church are people who for various reasons have left the pastoralist lifestyle, have opted for "modern" life in urbanized contexts, or have become assimilated with the Iraqw through intermarriage or other close social arrangements. Among traditionalists, mostly women, children and youth have become baptized and joined the church. Polygamist men have stayed away after finding the church and its monogamous practice to be unsympathetic towards, and incompatible with their ways.

In 2004, Mbulu diocese set up a special Datoga outreach program meant to be "culturally sensitive" in ways such as prioritizing the use of the Kidatoga language, undertake a special recruitment drive of Datoga evangelists and pastors, permit Datoga aesthetic expressions in church services etc. Some pastors are advocating a reconsideration of the restrictive marriage policy.

The argument for permitting baptism of converted polygamists is primordially spiritual, as explained by one pastor:

"The church has no mandate to hinder adult people from becoming baptized when they have become saved and wish to become disciples of Christ. That is the Lord's mandate! We cannot let things they unknowingly did in their pre-conversion state, be a hindrance for them after conversion. After conversion and baptism, the man cannot continue to take on new wives. And, of course, people who are already Christian cannot become polygamists."

Since the initiation of the special Datoga outreach program, about 40 local Datoga congregations have been started in peripheral sectors in the southern part of Mbulu. Due to the continuing influx of agriculturalists, however, pastoralists have been forced to move on to even more remoter areas. Many of the new congregations soon become dominated by non-Datoga, and this fact sets back the delicate task of building confidence in a group only too used to stigmatization. During the past ten years, approximately 1500 Datoga have been baptized, compared to around 3000 on a yearly basis in the rest of the diocese. Polygamists are still generally very sceptical of the church. To date, only two polygynous men have been baptized in lieu of the unofficial and more liberal practice.[40] What may happen when time comes for their sons to inherit large herds together with accompanying responsibilities, is a postponed predicament.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we have become acquainted with how Scandinavian Lutheran mission work and the resultant church in northern Tanzania have prioritized Christian morals and ethics when evaluating indigenous socio-cultural institutions.

Ethnographic data from Mbulu demonstrates that this approach has worked well with the Iraqw ethnic group, who have been able to "Christianize" behaviours and institutions without suffering any major consequences in other areas of life. For the pastoralist Datoga, however, it has not worked. Their polygamous marriage institution was, and still is inextricably tied to their core economic and socio-political alliance system. Since the church could not accept polygamy, traditional Datoga generally stayed away.

The Lutheran church's rediscovery of the still unreached traditional Datoga has

generated a need to remedy the impasse. The new strategy is to try to break the stigmatization of Datoga "tribal" imagery by starting local congregations and church services more attuned to their ways.

A Mbulu church official explains the importance of keeping the "good parts" of culture while rejecting the "bad ones". This approach is inspired by missiological inputs such as Hiebert's "critical contextualization" model, in which the church should study "the meanings and places of old beliefs and customs within their cultural setting and then evaluate them in the light of biblical norms".[41] This may ultimately amount to yet another reductionistic turn or open for a wider approach depending on the theological calibration.

A non-reductionistic social anthropological perspective brings to light new questions for missiology and diakonia to consider. The church acknowledges the predicaments involved in dealing dynamically with socio-cultural issues. Even if structures are imperfect – even if "non-Christian", they may still serve vital functions in producing and maintaining social order and well-being for human beings, and that is a biblical concern too. A humble realization of the fact that others are as much dependent on material and social solutions for sustenance and well-being as oneself, generates increased empathy for seeing the need to develop trajectories that seek viable solutions to peoples' lives. For the Datoga, this may include ways of encouraging alternative functional equivalents to social alliance building and cattle management.

Datoga polygamy is a form of life that may eventually disappear since it is being challenged by strong economic forces of change and pressure on land in Tanzania. However, as long as it exists, the church needs to continue to reach out to polygamists in increasingly considerate ways.[42]

Noter

1. *Ole Bjørn Rekdal, The Invention by Tradition: Creativity and change among the Iraqw of northern Tanzania. PhD-thesis. University of Bergen, 1999.*
2. *Paul G. Hiebert, Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change (Ada: Baker Academic, 2008), 72.*
3. *The influential cultural anthropology of scholars such as Clifford Geertz and his seminal work The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, 1973).*
4. *I.e. Axel Hofverberg, Rika Afrikaår (Uppsala: EFS-Bokförlag, 1949), Jon Jøssang, Mambo i Tanganyika (Oslo: Lunde forlag, 1959), Mathias Mjølhus, Mangati. Tanzanias krigerske no mader, (Oslo: Lunde forlag, 1972), Olav Fjose, En ny gave – en ny oppgave. Norsk Luthersk Misjonssambands arbeid i Tanzania (Oslo: Lunde forlag, 1994).*
5. *Fjose, En ny gave- en ny Oppgave, 210.*
6. *Fredrik Barth, Process and Form in Social Life, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).*
7. *Marina Grishakova and Marie-Lare Ryan, Intermediality and Storytelling. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010)*
8. *Asle Jøssang, "Reassessing Christian mission as an anthropological study object", Theofilos, 6 (2014), 436-444.*
9. *F. J. Bagshawe, "The Peoples of the Happy Valley (East Africa)." Journal of the Royal African Society, 24 (1924): 25-33.*
10. *Rekdal, The Invention by Tradition, 93.*
11. *Ibid.: 39.*
12. *Shohei Wada, "Political History of Mbulu District, power struggles and territorial groupings of medicine men", Kyoto University African Studies, 9 (1975): 45-68.*
13. *E. H. Winther, Territorial groupings and religion among the Iraqw. In M. Banton (ed.) Anthropological approaches to the study of religion, (London: Tavistock 1968): 155-174. R. J. Thornton, R.J, Space, time and culture among the Iraqw of Tanzania. (New York: Academic Press, 1980)*

14. Charles Meek (2011), Brief Authority, A Memoir of Colonial Administration in Tanganyika (London: Radcliffe Press 2011): 126

15. Ibid.: 126.

16. Ole Bjørn Rekdal and Astrid Blystad, "We are as sheep and goats", 1999.

17. Mbulu District Book, District Commission Records, 1931, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archive).

18. Hofverberg, Rika Afrikaår, Mjølhus, Mangati.

19. Astrid Blystad, Precarious Procreation. Datoga Pastoralists at the Late 20th Century. PhD-thesis. University of Bergen, 2000: 52.

20. 20 D. K. Ndagala, Ndagala, "The Unmaking of the Datoga, Decreasing Resources and Increasing Conflict in Rural Tanzania". Nomadic Peoples, 28 (1991): 71-82, Rekdal and Blystad: 163.

21. Mbulu District Book, District Commission Records, 1935, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archive).

22. Mbulu District Book, District Commission Records, 1927, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archive).

23. John Iliffe, A Modern History of Tanganyika, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 318.

24. Mbulu District Book, District Commission Records, 1943, (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania National Archive).

25. Ibid.

26. Thore Tafvelin and Gustav Lundmark, Ut i all världen. Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsens mission I Afrika og Asien 1866-1973, (Uppsala: EFS-Förlaget, 1973), 164.

27. Budbæreren 1940

28. Årbok 1951, (Oslo: Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband), 166.

29. Minutes from the Tanganyika Annual Missionary Conference 1951, Oslo: Norsk Luthersk Misjonssamband Archive

30. Meek, Brief Authority, 215.

31. Mjølhus, Mangati, Harold Faust, Mang'ati. Encounters in the Old Africa (Iron Mountain: Mailbos Depot Inc., 1998.)

32. George Klima, The Barabaig, East African Cattle-Herders. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), Blystad, Precarious Procreation, 165-166.

33. Mjølhus, Mangati, 58.

34. C. R. Lane and j. Pretty, Displaced pastoralists and transferred wheat technology in Tanzania, (London: International Institute for Environment and Development, 1990)

35. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives. 3. ed. (London: Pluto Press, 2010)

36. Blystad, Precarious Procreation, 237.

37. Ibid., 241.

38. Fjose, En ny gave – en ny oppgave, 81.

39. Silje Karin Åberge, Kyr eller kyrke? Datogafolkets identitetsopplevingar I kontrasten mellom kyrkjas monogame ekteskapspolitikk og datogafolkets polygame ekteskapstradisjon i Mbulu-distriktet i Tanzania. Master thesis. Stavanger: VID Specialized University, 2016.

40. These statistical informations provided by the Mulu dioces office in 2015.

41. Paul G. Hiebert, Hiebert, Anthropological Insights for Missionaries, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 18.

42. Special thanks to Bishop Nicolaus Nsanganzelu of ELCT Mbulu Diocese, Director of the Datoga Outreach Program, Joel Daniel, and NLM regional director in East Africa, Rune Mjølhus, for fruitful discussions, fellowship, and logistical assistance during field stays in Tanzania, 2012 – 2015