The Gender of Piety: family, faith, and colonial rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe by Wendy Urban-Mead (review)

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Wendy Urban-Mead, *The Gender of Piety: family, faith, and colonial rule in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe*. Athens OH: Ohio University Press (hb US$80 – 978 0 8214 2157 4; pb US$32.95 – 978 0 8214 2158 1). 2015, xiv + 324 pp.

Following her earlier close study of the influence of missionaries in South-western Zimbabwe, Wendy Urban-Mead's examination of the lives of six African converts and evangelists (three women and three men) takes the reader through Zimbabwean colonial history from African early battles and encounters with company pioneers and missionaries, through increased settler occupation and the attendant removal of Africans from their territories, to the liberation struggle and postcolonial conflicts. *The Gender of Piety* is a study of the Brethren in Christ Church (BICC) in Matabeleland from the end of the nineteenth century to the first decades of the twenty-first. Urban-Mead argues that men's and women's lives show different trajectories of piety, where piety is demonstrated by church membership and obedience to the tenets of the church. Men's piety is sequential, with men often leaving the church to fulfil masculine duties or follow pursuits not warranted by the church. In contrast, women's piety seems consistent with women's values and is constant. Her conclusions, based on her readings of missionary archives and colonial records, scholarship in African history and anthropology, as well as extensive interviews with the principals in her study and with their children and other relatives, is reassuring to those who have noted this pattern in African history: men and women both join missionary churches in search of a better life. Women seek freedom from restraining customs, and men, at least in the early days, want to gain knowledge of the powers of the conquerors. Both men and women adapt the religious tenets to their lives, but women more often break with family to abide by the church's teachings while men break with the church to engage in worldly activities.

The pacifist doctrine of the BICC, an Anabaptist denomination similar to the Mennonites, holds that believers should feel the warmth of God in their hearts, confess and be baptized, and retreat from worldly pursuits. In politics, they should not resist authority, whether it is just or not, and believers should not engage in violence or go to war. After the hardening of the colour bar, forced removal from their ancestral land and destocking of cattle, some believers lost faith. Men left the church to join the liberation struggle. But the pull of politics was not the only thing that made men backsliders. Monogamy, modest living and abstention from alcohol also posed problems for them. The detailed biographies of the men studied show that conventional Matabele masculinity – kinship responsibilities, fatherhood and camaraderie – swayed some men. To attain fatherhood, one entered into a polygynous marriage when a first wife was childless. Men drank beer with their friends and kin. But their piety was sequential: each of the three men studied returned to the church and one former backslider became the leader of the church in Zimbabwe. The latter, Reverend Steven Ndlovu, faced one of the greatest tests of his faith during the *Gurkurahundi* (the postcolonial murderous attack on the people of Matabeleland), when he stepped into the world to join with leaders of other religious groups appealing to the head of state to end the atrocities. In the twenty-first century, church members in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean diaspora are reconceptualizing their religious practice to include working for justice and peace.

Urban-Mead has done solid work. She has a great feel for history and pulls the reader into her stories. The life histories in this volume are wonderfully contextualized and the conclusions incontrovertible. Because her reasoning is so cogent, there is one area that this reader would have liked her to give more thought to: namely, what makes women so constant in their belief? In discussing men,

Urban-Mead explains that meeting Matabele demands of masculinity pulls them away from the church. The reader is left, using parallel reasoning, to conclude that Matabele demands of femininity keep women out of the world of politics and war and in the church. But Urban-Mead does not present here the contours of women's power and the demands of femininity. The women pastors and evangelists she presents break Matabele social rules: one is an unmarried mother and the others escaped arranged or levirate marriages. Did their social vulnerability increase their attachment to their faith? One courageous female pastor confronted competing armies to protect her flock. Was her sense of responsibility for others influenced by cultural understandings of what it means to be a woman as well as by religious convictions? More attention to what is taken for granted in women's lives would have helped this study. Even so, Urban-Mead's work is outstanding in its attention to the ups and downs of individual lives and in showing these lives within the currents of religion and history.

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May Chazan, *The Grandmothers' Movement: solidarity and survival in the time of AIDS*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press (CAD$29.95 – 978 0 77354 486 4). 2015, 234 pp.

At the heart of May Chazan's new ethnography is a fascinating puzzle about the kinds of political possibility emerging from the HIV crisis in Southern Africa. Her book recounts the first few years of the 'Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign', an effort catalysed by the Stephen Lewis Foundation (SLF) in Canada that connected largely white, middle-class grandmothers in Canada with *gogos* (isiZulu for grandmothers) in Southern Africa in a campaign to mobilize a response to the epidemic. These *gogos* bore the brunt of the HIV care burden in places such as KwaZulu Natal, the setting of the South African portion of Chazan's ethnography and a province where HIV prevalence can top 40 per cent. Her book tracks the development of the campaign in the mid-2000s both in Canada, where much of the organizing and most of the funding was situated, and in South Africa, where local NGO volunteers, healthcare workers, middle-class 'champions' and local groups of grandmothers all worked to respond to intersecting crises of HIV, poverty, inequality and violence. The grandmothers' campaign enjoyed rapid success, despite the global financial crisis and the recent shift away from the historically high levels of global HIV funding.

Chazan's book describes how the campaign brought significant change not only for South African grandmothers and their families and communities but also for the Canadian grandmothers, who developed new forms of solidarity, engagement and identification. This is an ethnography of a global HIV campaign but it focuses on how it was interpreted and experienced by different sets of actors across a wide range of contexts. It makes a complex and compelling argument about how global connections can have unpredictable effects, effects that are not reducible to conventional narratives about oppressive North–South relationships. These are shaped not only by the various contexts, relationships and local structures at play, but also by the agency and creativity of those involved in this effort. One of Chazan's central arguments is that this campaign emerged, developed, matured and had considerable impact despite the fact that its chief protagonists,