

**‘Unbreakable Bones:
Christian Mission and the Resilience of Temi Culture’**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the Batemi of northern Tanzania and the symbols through which they assign meaning in their world. At the centre of the research lies the inquiry of how the Batemi reproduce their individual and communal identity through practices and beliefs in the context of a modernizing post-colonial nation-state. Interacting amongst themselves and with their immediate neighbours – primarily the Maasai – the Batemi show a remarkable resilience in promoting their own choices which are based on their customs, called *gitemi*.

The research is based on a long-term involvement with the Batemi and draws from a multitude of collected empirical material, interviews, participant observation, historical materials, and on the insights gained from discussions with Temi contributors. The investigation combines primary data revealing the Batemi’s insights and interpretations of their culture along with my own reflections and understanding of the significance of core processes that shape Temi self-understanding.

The Batemi are often portrayed as an unusually hard case of successful resistance against Christianity and Westernization at a time when the majority of other Tanzanian people groups have undergone significant change after having been affected by Christianity. In the encounter between the Batemi and outside observers (colonial personnel, anthropologists and missionaries), the latter portrayed Temi religion almost exclusively as a set of beliefs in a divine being called Ghambageu. Convinced that Ghambageu provided an opportune analogy to communicate a Christian gospel, the missionaries focused on a comparison between Jesus and Ghambageu in their attempt to evangelize the Batemi. However, this study concludes that the core of Temi religion, and indeed of their culture, is tied up with activities and beliefs surrounding the Kirimo rituals, rather than with the myths of Ghambageu. Furthermore, I suggest that it is this misguided notion of Temi religion which ultimately led to a failure to establish a viable church among the Batemi.

The study calls for a reappraisal of the Christian mission approach to traditional African communities like the Batemi, and an invitation to re-evaluate a dogmatic concept of religion in the light of the presented Temi religious phenomenon.