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Sociol Relig. 2017 ; 78(4): 411–436. doi:10.1093/socrel/srx027.**Women's Schooling and Religious Mobility: Joining, Switching, and Quitting Church in a Christian Sub-Saharan Setting****Victor Agadjanian**

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Abstract

In dialogue with mainly western literature on determinants of religious mobility and the evidence on the transformative role of mass education in developing settings, we examine the relationship of educational attainment with religious reaffiliation and disaffiliation in the context of rural and small-town sub-Saharan Africa. Adapting western scholarship to the realities of that context, where most people do not complete primary school, we conceptualize both basic education and religious belonging as parts and expressions of profound societal transformations in the sub-continent. We use data from a survey of women aged 18–50 conducted in a predominantly Christian area in Mozambique to test this relationship from both the lifetime and dynamic perspectives. We find a strong positive association between educational level and the probability of church switching, with modest variations by denominational destination of and main reasons for reaffiliation. Disaffiliation is negatively related to schooling level. These findings are situated within a broader discourse on religion, development, and social change in the sub-Sahara.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary global Christianity is characterized by growing doctrinal and denominational diversity (Jenkins 2011). The rise and decline of different currents and forms of Christian faith is largely shaped by changing dynamics of religious joining, switching (reaffiliation), and quitting (disaffiliation).¹ At the same time, these dynamics reflect broader societal transformations in many parts of the globe. The expansion of mass education, especially among women, is a core feature and engine of these global transformations. In this study, we connect these two phenomena—the spread of mass schooling and the diversification of Christianity—to examine the relationship between women's education and their religious mobility in a typical rural/small-town, predominantly Christian sub-Saharan setting.

Whereas little is known about religious switching in sub-Saharan contexts beyond common observations of a massive growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches and a relative decline of historical, mission-based churches (e.g., Gifford 2004; Kalu 2003; Meyer 2004), the western, and especially the U.S.-focused scholarship on the topic is quite rich. Switching religious affiliation has been common in the U.S. (Loveland 2003; Roof 1989) but also has

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¹Although there is no terminological standard in the religious studies literature, following Stark and Finke (2000), we use *reaffiliation*, or *switching*, to denote “shifts within religious traditions,” as distinguished from *conversion*, or “shift across religious traditions.” Quitting (disaffiliation, apostacy) here means both permanent and temporary (a year or more) cessation of religious affiliation.

varied greatly across religious denominations and traditions (Sherkat 2001; Smith and Sikkink 2003). It has long been argued, for example, that switching is influenced by the relative societal status of different denominations and churches: denominations whose membership confers higher status to their members have been more attractive than lower status denominations (Roof and Hadaway 1979; Stark and Glock 1968). Yet, other studies have provided evidence that more conservative churches, which at least in early stages of their existence have a lower status than do more liberal ones, have been growing most vigorously (Iannaccone 1994; Kelley 1972; Thomas and Olson 2010). In addition, switching has been more common in churches with more flexible membership requirements than in churches with stricter membership rules and commitment expectations (Roof and Hadaway 1979; Sherkat 1991).

The western scholarship points to gender differences in religious affiliation and attendance/religiosity, with women typically displaying higher rates of both (Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers 2002; McFarland et al 2011: 177, 179; Schwadel 2014: 13; Schwadel 2015: 410). However, no consistent gender patterns in probabilities of switching or disaffiliation have been found (e.g., Loveland 2003: 153; Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990; Sherkat and Wilson 1995).

Among factors increasing the likelihood of switching, the literature singles out religious intermarriage (e.g., Hadaway and Marler 1993; Lofland and Stark 1965; Musick and Wilson 1995; Newport 1979; Sherkat 1991; 2004) and geographic mobility (Bibby 1997; Sherkat 1991). In comparison, the role of socioeconomic characteristics, especially education, in religious (re)affiliation and disaffiliation, as in religious involvement in general, has been complex and has varied across different historical periods and across denominations (Brown 2012; Hill 2011; Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Schwadel 2011).

Notably, the western literature typically focuses on the effects of post-secondary education. However, in many less developed countries, especially in impoverished settings of sub-Saharan Africa, the levels of educational attainment, particularly among women, remain very low, and the relationship between schooling and religious mobility may therefore differ from that observed in more developed societies. This study uses unique survey data from a predominantly Christian setting in Mozambique, to examine the role of women's education in religious joining, switching and quitting across different types of Christian denominations. The study setting is, of course, vastly distinct from the U.S. and other western contexts where religious mobility has been relatively well studied. However, the firmly established, even if constantly evolving, Christian denominational palette of that setting facilitates a conceptual dialogue with the western scholarship, at least in comparison with societies dominated by other religious traditions.

BACKGROUND: EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS MOBILITY

In earlier modern history of the U.S. and other western societies, education was often associated with greater religious involvement (Brown 2012). It is typically assumed that rising educational levels in the post-World War II period accompanied and ushered in greater secularism and disengagement from religion (Fahey et al. 2006: 52; Johnson 1997; Wuthnow

1988). However, as tertiary education further expanded in the last quarter of the 20th – early 21st cc., the negative association between post-secondary education and religious affiliation and involvement has weakened (Schwadel 2014). In fact, Hill's (2011) analysis detected a moderate positive relationship between graduating from college and involvement with institutionalized religion. Uecker et al. (2007) showed that US young adults who attend university have higher levels of religious participation than those who do not, although Hill (2009) qualified that the correlation between college attendance and religiosity depends on the denomination with which educational institutions are associated, and Stoppa and Lefkowitz (2010) noted that college experience affect some aspects of religious behavior more than others. The relationship between university experience and religiosity may also vary across denominations. Thus, according to McFarland et al. (2011), higher levels of education are associated with increased religiosity in certain types of denominations, such as Roman Catholics, evangelical Protestant, or black Protestant. In comparison, Merrill et al. (2003) found no effect of tertiary education on religiosity among Mormons. Beyond western settings, Schwadel (2015) analyzed the association between university education and religiosity using cross-national survey data. In his analysis, the association of university education with religiosity varied across religious contexts: it tended to be negative in more religious countries but positive in more secular countries. None of these recent studies, however, explicitly look at the education-religion connection through a gendered lens.

Western research has also addressed the role of education in religious reaffiliation. Evidence from the U.S. typically points to a positive relationship between education and switching. Thus Loveland (2003), using General Social Survey (GSS) data, found a strong positive effect of educational attainment on the likelihood of religious switching. Likewise, Schwadel's (2011) study, also based on GSS data, reported a positive association between education and reaffiliation. However, that study also found variations in the strength of this association across religious denominations: highly educated adults were more likely to switch to mainline Protestant denominations, paralleling evidence from other western settings (e.g., Brown 2012: 242–3). Research on education and religious switching is connected to that on education and disaffiliation. From the secularization perspective, disaffiliation has often been seen as a sign of rationalized disenchantment with religion, especially among better educated younger people (e.g., Newport 1979; Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers 2002). Yet, more recent research finds no evidence that in the U.S. university education (Schwadel 2011) or college experience (Mayrl and Oeur 2009) increase the likelihood of disaffiliation. Again, however, western scholarship on the link between education and switching or disaffiliation does not examine its gender aspect directly.

Compared to the relatively rich body of literature in the West, remarkably little research on religious joining, reaffiliation, and quitting in general, and the role of education in these processes in particular, has been conducted in developing settings. Studies have explored conversion to Christianity in earlier historical eras (e.g., Kane and Park 2009; Kent 2004) or in unique contemporary contexts such as communist China (e.g., Yang 2005). A number of historical and qualitative studies have focused on the rise of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, primarily in Latin America (e.g., Gooren 2010; Smilde 2005; 2007; Steigenga and Cleary 2007) and sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Engelke 2004; van de Kamp 2016). In a rare exception, Barro et al. (2010), using survey data from several countries,

including some in the developing world, found a positive association between country education levels and the rates of religious conversion. However, their analysis was limited to macro-level correlates of conversion rates. We are not aware of any individual-level survey data analyses of the role of education in religious reaffiliation and quitting in the sub-Saharan.

Adapting the extant, primarily western, scholarship to a developing, largely Christian rural/small-town sub-Saharan setting, our study employs individual-level survey data collected from a representative sample of women to examine both cumulatively and dynamically the role of educational attainment in women's religious joining, switching, and quitting. Our broader goal is to situate the dynamics of women's reaffiliation and disaffiliation, and by extension, the very nature of women's religious belonging and involvement, within a context of rapid societal change. Western education has been at the core of the dramatic and multifaceted transformations of sub-Saharan and other developing societies (Buchmann and Hannum 2001).

Formal schooling was first introduced in much of the sub-Saharan, as in many other parts of the colonized world, by Christian missions that saw western education as an instrument of both spiritual and cultural "advancement" of local peoples (Kallaway and Swartz 2016). After the end of colonialism, however, the primary education systems have become increasingly (and in some countries, such as Mozambique, almost entirely) controlled and dispensed by the state and, to a much smaller extent, the secular private sector (e.g., Fox et al. 2012). Recent decades have seen a major expansion of access to and coverage of education, but educational attainment, especially among women, still remains low, as do the learning outcomes of schooling (Pritchett 2013; Smith-Greenaway 2015).

Yet, the impact of women's schooling, even at lower levels, extends beyond the acquisition of literacy and other academic skills. The transformative consequences of mass female education in the sub-continent have been best studied with respect to demographic and health outcomes. This scholarship has often connected education with improved child survival or successful fertility regulation through women's enhanced decision-making power and autonomy, rather than increased literacy skills or health knowledge acquired in the classroom (e.g., Caldwell 1986; Cleland 2010; Jejeebhoy 1995). More generally, schooling, even at the most basic levels, nurtures girls' expectations and aspirations outside the realm of family, childrearing, and domestic and subsistence production to which women are traditionally confined, and the school-inspired mindset may persist over time and imprint the rest of their lives even if their academic skills may fade. We extend this perspective, with appropriate qualifications, to other domains of women's lives, such as their options and choices of spiritual and social belonging.

CONTEXT

Our study uses data from southern Mozambique, an impoverished sub-Saharan nation of some 28 million inhabitants, GNI per capita of US\$590, and, that gained independence from Portugal in 1975. Primary education in Mozambique is offered almost entirely through a network of public schools; despite the government's efforts to expand basic education (Fox et al., 2012), the national primary school completion rate is only 48% (World Bank 2015),

and barriers to education remain particularly steep for girls (Roby, Lambert, and Lambert 2009).

As many other parts of the sub-continent, Mozambique is home to a vast array of religious creeds and affiliations. Historically, organized religious landscape of Mozambique's south, where our data come from, was largely defined by churches that are often referred to as "mainline" or "core" – the Catholic Church and the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other early mission-based Protestant Churches. The "core" position of these churches throughout most of the 20th century owed largely to their political preeminence: the Catholic Church dominated in the Portuguese colonial empire (similar to former Belgian and several French colonies), but mission-based Protestants, implanted in Mozambique during the colonial period, were also quite salient and produced a sizable share of African political and professional elites (Cruz e Silva 2001a). Although the population share of these churches has been shrinking in the independent years, they have retained privileged, even if informal, connections to the educated and politically influential class.

In the last half-century, Mozambique, as much of the rest of the sub-Saharan and other parts of the developing world (Anderson 2013; Garrard 2009; Kalu 2003), has experienced a massive growth of Pentecostal and Charismatic-type churches. Yet, as elsewhere in the sub-continent, such churches in Mozambique do not lend themselves to a straightforward classification (cf. Anderson 2002; Garrard 2009). The churches that are summarily labeled as Zionist rose to demographic prominence in the late colonial and early post-colonial periods. These churches first penetrated Mozambique from South Africa, often brought by Mozambican labor migrants returning from work in the neighboring country. In Mozambique, these churches found fertile ground for growth and expansion: masses of disenfranchised peasants coerced into nominal—and therefore often meaningless—affiliation with the Catholic Church and, at the same time, deeply entrenched and pervasive local beliefs in the healing (and harming) power of spirits (Agadjanian 1999; Cruz e Silva 2001b; Pfeiffer 2002). Their growth was partly facilitated by the political decline of the Catholic Church, especially when, in the wake of Mozambique's independence, the new socialist government launched an all-out assault against that once staunch pillar of the *ancien régime*. It has been also argued that the neoliberal structural adjustment policies that replaced the socialist experiment in the late 1980s and exacerbated socioeconomic inequalities and insecurities have contributed to the growth of Zionist and similar churches (Pfeiffer et al. 2007). According to the 2007 national population census, Zionists constituted 35% of the population in the southern region of the country (where our study site is located), outnumbering Catholics by a ratio of 3 to 1 (INE 2009). This group, however, is not uniform: there exists a great variety of Zionist churches and many of them are fairly small and short-lived. Yet, all of them are centered ideologically and organizationally on the practice of miracle healing through the power of the Holy Spirit reinforced by divine prophecy, exorcism, and glossolalia (Agadjanian 1999).

While the label of "Zionist" is clearly and unequivocally understood and applied in the local religious market, other types of churches, especially the churches commonly known as "Apostolic," that are also native to the southern African region, have similar ideological features and social practices and are often seen by the populace as part of the same category of churches that "specialize" in healing sickness through deliverance from evil. Like

Zionists, Apostolics emerged on the margins of the local religious market in the second half of the 20th century and since then have increasingly challenged the demographic, ideological, and political supremacy of the “core” denominations. Yet, unlike loosely organized Zionists, most Apostolic churches have a distinctly more rigid and introverted organizational structure and a set of strict and relatively well-enforced rules and regulations for their members.

In addition to the growth of African-initiated Zionist and Apostolic churches, Mozambique has seen a proliferation of global Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and, more recently, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, a Brazilian import, that are redefining the religious fringe. Like other global Pentecostals, these churches first catered to the nation’s relatively affluent urbanites, appealing to them with a more sophisticated (by Zionist measure) promise of wholesome wellness (e.g., van de Kamp 2016). However, as the urban religious market has become saturated and rural incomes have slowly risen, these new Pentecostal churches have increasingly encroached into the countryside.

Although Mozambique has a sizeable Muslim population, most Muslims are concentrated in the northern part of the country and their share in the area of southern Mozambique where the data used in this study were collected is less than one percent. Muslims are therefore excluded from our analysis. Finally, whereas traditional beliefs and practices remain widespread in the region (Cruz e Silva and Loforte 1998)—and are barely masked in many Zionist rituals—the fraction of the population that does not have at least a nominal affiliation with a Christian church or Islam is typically small. Hence, in the study setting, as in many other parts of the sub-Saharan, there is no abundant reservoir of adherents of “traditional” religion from which the two world religions and their subdivisions could draw new members.

HYPOTHESES

We construe both education and religious mobility as ingredients and markers of societal change. In connecting the two, we are guided by the reviewed literature, primarily from the U.S. and other western contexts. This literature suggests that a positive association between education and religious switching (e.g., Loveland 2003; Schwadel 2011). Projecting the evidence on the association of *tertiary* education with religious mobility in those contexts to rural and small-town sub-Saharan Africa, such as the one examined here, where most women do not finish primary school, must be done with caution. Nonetheless, we assume that the social meaning and consequences of education are similar: increased education, even at very low levels, nurtures greater ability to set and pursue individual goals, including the goals that defy the status quo. In sub-Saharan settings, this transformative effect of education is especially strong for women, whose opportunities for changing their lives are otherwise greatly constrained by entrenched gender inequalities. At the same time, we argue that in highly religious contexts, such as that of rural and small-town Mozambique, religion is one of the few avenues for spiritual and social enhancement available to women outside of the kinship- and marriage-based world. Thus, education-driven new attitudes and aspirations may be expressed and exercised, at least in part, through religious pursuits.

We therefore hypothesize that women's education should have a positive relationship with both the lifetime likelihood and the dynamic propensity for joining/switching to a(nother) church (Hypothesis 1). At the same time, because switching to higher-status church typically entails gain of social standing, while switching to lower-status churches may lead to its loss (Roof and Hadaway 1979; Stark and Glock 1968), the effect of education should be destination church-specific, with more educated individuals gravitating toward mainline churches and, to a lesser extent, higher-status Pentecostal churches (Hypothesis 2).

Next, we look at the effect of education by reason for joining/switching. As was described earlier, the pursuit of health and cure is an important element of religious involvement in this and similar settings, and religious-based healing often competes with biomedical options (cf., Manglos and Trinitapoli 2011). However, based on extensive evidence that women's education is positively associated with utilization of modern medicine (e.g., Caldwell 1986; Cleland 2010; Jejeebhoy 1995), we expect that more educated people should be less likely to join/switch for health reasons than less educated ones (Hypothesis 3a). While switching for marriage, a universal expectation for women in patrilineal settings, should be education-neutral (Hypothesis 3b), switching because of personal preference and similar reasons, which typically reflects choice, should be more common among better educated women (Hypothesis 3c).

Although from the secularization perspective education should lead to withdrawal from religion, recent western evidence does not support this association (e.g., Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Schwadel 2011). Our hypothesis on the relationship between education and church quitting connects this evidence with our general assumption that in developing settings such as the one examined here, organized Christianity connotes greater engagement with western-inspired modernity (Keane 2007; Van Der Veer 1996). While specific manifestations of the widely acknowledged structural connection between Christianity and modernity are sometimes difficult to capture and assess empirically, formal religious membership may be construed as an individual marker of this connection. At the same time, greater educational attainment is also a universal feature of integration into global modern life. Therefore we hypothesize that individuals with higher educational attainment should be less likely, *ceteris paribus*, to quit a church (Hypothesis 4a). As an addition to this analysis, we look at educational differences in current church absenteeism among affiliated women: non-attendance may be a sign of disengagement from the church, or from organized religion in general. Again, we hypothesize that education should be negatively associated with church absenteeism (Hypothesis 4b).

Finally, we want to investigate if the effects of denominational type and of education are interactive rather than additive. As mentioned earlier, western-based research suggests that the association of education with religious affiliation and switching may vary across denominations (e.g., Brown 2012: 242–3; McFarland et al. 2011; Schwadel 2011). In developing settings, the effect of education on the propensities for and directions of switching may also differ by denominational type. However, in the absence of prior scholarship on variations in the meaning and implications of educational attainment across different faiths and denominations in sub-Saharan and similar developing settings, this part of our analysis is exploratory.

DATA AND METHOD

The data come for a population-based survey conducted in 2008 among women aged 18–50 in Chibuto district, a typical semi-rural district of some 200,000 inhabitants in southern Mozambique, where elementary (primary) education is provided almost entirely through public schools and where various Christian churches co-exist and compete on the religious scene. The sample of 2019 households was drawn randomly from 82 clusters, which had been chosen also randomly within the town (district’s administrative center) and rural sampling domains; one eligible woman was randomly selected in each household. The survey, conducted in-person, mostly in Changana, the main local language, collected detailed information on respondents’ current religious affiliation and participation as well as history of their all past affiliations including years of switching or quitting churches (as different from changing congregations within the same church). Respondents who reported changes in affiliation were asked to state the main reason(s) for such change(s). While standardized retrospective survey questions cannot capture all nuances of individuals’ “conversion careers” (Gooren 2010), they do generate a reliable account of main switching and quitting events. After the exclusion of 11 Muslims, the analytic sample consists of 2008 women, 88.4% of whom reported being affiliated with a church.

We subdivide the sample into five religious denominational groups—Catholic, Mainline Protestant, Apostolic, Zionist, and New Pentecostal (henceforth also referred to simply as Pentecostal)—in addition to women who reported no religious affiliation at the time of survey. This classification was generated on the basis of responses to a standard question on affiliation with a religion, rather than involvement or attendance. This classification may not be fully accurate on purely theological grounds, especially with respect to such heterogeneous groups as mainline Protestant or Pentecostals. However, based on extensive prior research in this part of Mozambique (e.g., Agadjanian 2005; 2013; 2014; 2015; Agadjanian and Yabiku 2015), we believe that this classification reflects the “bottom-up” views of denominational differences, i.e., the views that local actors collectively establish on the basis of their everyday knowledge and experience, rather than some poorly understood and rarely heeded “top-down” doctrinal intricacies. For convenience, hereafter we also refer to these denominational categories simply as denominations. The terms “reaffiliation” and “switching” are used to denote changing churches both within and across these denominational categories, but not changing congregations within the same church, since the age of twelve years. The age threshold is chosen given girls’ early transition to adulthood and marriage in this setting. Also, around this age the majority of girls end schooling.²

The predictor of interest is educational attainment. It is coded as a set of dummies: no education (never attended school), 1 to 4 years of education (the traditional first-level primary school), and 5 or more years of education.³ After an initial exploration of switching/joining patterns by education, we look at lifetime experience of church switching by fitting a multivariate Poisson regression model predicting the number of times respondent switched

²At the exploratory stage, we fitted models starting exposure to risk of switching from age 15. The results of those models do not differ notably from those presented here. The results of the exploratory models are available upon request.

³Only 5% of the sample reported having more than seven years of education, the upper boundary of second-level primary schooling in the nation’s current educational system.

church affiliation. In this model, the dependent variable has three values: never switched church, switched church once, and switched church twice or more times (fewer than 1% of respondents switched churches three or more times). The model controls for denominational affiliation at the time of survey. The model also controls for respondent's age in both the linear and quadratic forms as switching probability typically varies across the lifespan (Roof 1989). The limitations of the retrospective data do not allow us to account for household conditions and socialization in early life, factors that are widely thought to influence the propensity for reaffiliation (e.g., Hadaway and Marler 1993; Sherkat and Wilson 1995; Sullins 1993) and could also affect educational outcomes. As a simple proxy for respondent's childhood milieu, we use the type of community where she spent her childhood, coded as a dichotomy: rural area vs. town (typically, the district headquarter and surrounding suburbs). Finally, because of the earlier mentioned association of religious switching with residential mobility, the model includes a dichotomy of whether or not respondent has ever changed community of residence after reaching the age of 12.⁴

Next, we look at switching/joining dynamically using an event-history approach. In these analyses, religious moves include not only switching from one church to another but also joining a church by non-affiliated women. We first fit a discrete-time binomial logistic regression model predicting the probability of joining a(nother) church in any given year after reaching the age of 12. We then fit two discrete-time multinomial logistic regression models. In the first of them, joining/switching is considered by the denominational type of destination church. Accordingly, the outcome is joining/switching to a Mainline (Catholic or mainline Protestant), Apostolic, Zionist, or Pentecostal church, relative to not joining (remaining in the current church or remaining unaffiliated). As in all event-history models for multiple outcomes, in this model the probabilities of joining a church in each of the four denominational groups are assumed to be mutually "non-informative," i.e., completely independent from each other. In the second model, joining a(nother) church is viewed through the prism of the main reason for joining – marriage, health, or other (usually, some personal or social preferences). Again, the probabilities of joining a church for any of these three types of reasons, relative to not joining, are assumed to be mutually non-informative.

All the event-history models include the same set of dummies for educational attainment; it is used as time-invariant as individuals who continue their education past fourth grade, typically enter fifth grade by age 10 or 11 (hence by age 12, at which exposure starts, practically all women in the sample can be assigned to one of the three educational categories). Age and age squared in year t represent the baseline hazard function. The models controls for denominational affiliation status lagged by one year (time-varying), joining/switching experience prior to year t (time-varying) and the type of childhood area of residence – rural or town (time-invariant). Detailed calendars of residential moves are not available, but the models control for lifetime experience of residential mobility (time-invariant).

⁴In exploratory analyses, we also tested a logistic regression model in which the outcome is a dichotomy – switched church at least once vs. never switched. The results were very similar to those of the Poisson model. We prefer to show the results of the Poisson model as it better captures both the propensity to switch churches and the frequency of switching. The results of the binomial logistic regression results are not shown but are available upon request.

In the analysis of quitting (disaffiliation), we define the outcome as exiting a church with a subsequent lapse in affiliation of at least one year. Here, we fit a discrete-time logistic regression model predicting the probability of quitting a church in any given year t after age 12. The model includes the same covariates as the reaffiliation event-history models. In addition, because we view church absenteeism as a potential precursor to quitting, we fit a binomial logistic regression model predicting church attendance in the two weeks preceding the survey among women with declared religious affiliation. The outcome is: attended church at least once vs. never attended. In addition to current denominational membership, the model controls for several other characteristics measured at the time of survey. Finally, to explore the data for possible interactions between denomination type and education, we add the corresponding interaction terms to all the models.

Our focus on lower levels of education attainment, which are typically offered through the public school system and are reached in early teen years, reduces concerns about endogeneity of education with respect to individual religious mobility. Nonetheless, we stress that the purpose of the multivariate tests is only to establish statistical associations; even considering the early termination of education in the study setting and the time sequencing afforded by the event-history approach, no causality can be definitively asserted. All the statistical models are fitted in Stata, v.14; the *svy* routine is used to account for the survey cluster sampling design.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows switching experience by education and denomination. It illustrates the educational advantage of Catholics and mainline Protestants, even though in the proportion of those with five or more years of schooling Pentecostals are not too far behind. Yet, the strongest contrast is between affiliated and non-affiliated women, with the latter being by far the least educated. Not surprisingly, non-affiliated women's disadvantage decreases when we consider only the respondents with experience of switching. Among affiliated ever-switchers, the cross-denominational differences in educational attainment are somewhat less pronounced than among all the respondents, but the general pattern of these differences is the same. Table 1 also shows the breakdown of the sample by previous affiliation and main reasons for switching.

Table 2 presents the results of a Poisson regression model predicting the number of times respondent joined/switched to a church. Schooling level shows a strong positive net association with lifetime switching experience, as was predicted by our main hypothesis (H1). Interestingly, however, the effect of schooling does not seem to accrue as education increases beyond the fourth grade.

To examine the probability of switching/joining dynamically, we fit a discrete-time logistic regression model with a binary outcome – whether or not respondent joined a(nother) church in a given year after reaching the age of 12. Table 3 displays the results. Regardless of denomination, the effect of education is strong and highly significant statistically – more educated women are more likely to switch to a(nother) church in any given year – and this effect is linear, increasing across the three educational attainment levels. This result provides

additional support for our general hypothesis on the association of education and reaffiliation (H1).

Next, we expand the event-history analysis by considering the denominational destinations of switchers/joiners. Table 4 presents the results of a multinomial discrete-time logistic regression model that predicts the probability of joining/switching to a church in one of four denominational categories. As the results show, for all denominational destinations, more educated women are more likely to switch/join churches than are less educated ones. Notably, the effects are strongest and have a clear linear pattern for joining/switching to mainline and Pentecostal churches. In comparison, for joining/switching to a Zionist church 1–4 years of schooling do not make a difference, and for joining/switching to an Apostolic church the effect of education does not differ between women with 1–4 years and 5-plus years of school. These results thus partially agree with the expected educational differences across denominational destinations (H2).

The next multinomial discrete-time logistic regression model looks at risks of joining/switching from a different angle – that of reason for joining/switching. The results are presented in Table 5. Education shows a strong and linear association with joining/switching for marriage and for “other” reasons: the odds of both switching to husband’s church (or, to view it differently, of marrying a man from a church other than her own) and looking for a new religious experience are higher among better educated women. Surprisingly, women with 5 or more years of schooling are also more likely than women with no education to join/switch to a church for health-related reason: while the magnitude of this effect is much smaller than in the cases of joining/switching for marriage and for other reasons, the effect is statistically significant. These results contradict our expectations (H3a) and invite a more refined assessment of the meaning of religious belonging and, especially, the notion of faith-based healing in sub-Saharan contexts (cf. Manglos and Trinitapoli 2011).

To examine how religious affiliation predicts quitting, we fit another event-history model. Only the respondents who had a religious affiliation at age 12 are included in this analysis. The discrete-time binomial logistic regression model predicting disaffiliation in any given year controls for religious affiliation in the previous year and urban-vs-rural background. Observations are censored at the year of quitting or at the year of interview if no disaffiliation is reported. The results of this model are presented in Table 6. As these results show, women who have only 1–4 years of education are not different from uneducated women. In comparison, the effect of having 5 or more years of schooling is highly significant: women in that educational category are significantly less likely to exit a church than women who had not gone to school, regardless of denomination and other characteristics. This result generally supports our hypothesis on the association of education with apostasy (H4a).

Table 7 presents the results of a binomial logistic regression model predicting church attendance. The results show that, net of other factors, education is positively associated with the likelihood of having attended church at least once, net of other factors. Interestingly, as in the model of lifetime experience of switching (Table 2), the relationship is not linear: although the coefficients for 1–4 years and for 5-plus years of school are both statistically

significant, they have nearly identical values, suggesting no increase in the likelihood of attendance (decrease in the likelihood of absenteeism) with an increase of education beyond a few years. In general, however, this result fits with our hypothesis on educational attainment and absenteeism (H4b).

Finally, to explore the data for possible moderating effects of education on denominational patterns of switching and quitting, we add the terms for interaction between denomination of origin and educational attainment to all the above models. However, no interpretable moderating effects could be detected (the results of the interactive models are not shown but are available upon request). We therefore conclude that the effects of denomination of origin and education on reaffiliation and disaffiliation are largely independent.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Religious affiliation dynamics in today's sub-Saharan Africa are imprinted by historical legacies of religious development as well as contemporary socioeconomic, cultural, and even political circumstances. Religious mobility is both a reflection and an ingredient of broader societal transformations; it encapsulates, expresses, and fosters the complex symbiosis of tradition and modernity in the sub-continent. As such, religious switching as an individual behavior incorporates elements of status assertion, family building, and health and wellness seeking, along with a "purely" religious spiritual quest. At the same time, switching is shaped and constrained by the configuration and composition of the local religious marketplace (e.g., Olson 2008) and the related characteristics of individuals' and families' social ties (e.g., Smilde 2005; Smith and Sikkink 2003; Stark and Bainbridge 1980; Stroope 2012). It may also be influenced by changes in community socioeconomic environment or inordinate societal pressures and shocks such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic (see Agadjanian and Menjívar 2011; Trinitapoli 2015 for the influence of the epidemic on religious teachings and practices in sub-Saharan contexts). The retrospective survey data at our disposal, despite their numerous unique qualities, do not allow us to account for these intricately evolving contingencies over time (and hardly any survey data on religion ever collected in a non-western setting do). Nor do they fully capture the processual nature of reaffiliation and quitting: as cross-national evidence suggests, marriage-unrelated switching is often a protracted process predicated on a variety of conditions and circumstances (e.g., Gooren 2010; Lofland and Stark 1965; Rambo 1993; Snow and Machalek 1984). The process of quitting can also be quite lengthy (e.g., Sandomirsky and Wilson 1990). And like any retrospective reports, those dealing with someone's religious experience may be subject to post-hoc rationalization and recall bias.

These limitations notwithstanding, our study usefully contributes to the understanding of reaffiliation/disaffiliation dynamics in less developed settings by linking these complex dynamics to the spread of mass female schooling, which, arguably, has been one of the most dramatic global social revolutions of the modern era. As we hypothesized, in our sample of rural/small-town women schooling, even at such low levels, was positively associated with the likelihood of religious reaffiliation regardless of origin denomination. Interestingly, educational attainment also was a strong predictor of reaffiliation regardless of denominational destination, but it was particularly so for switching to a "core" church, and

to a lesser extent, a New Pentecostal church. Interpreted through the prism of a strong association between the status of a religious denomination and educational attainment of its members documented in western settings (e.g., Keister and Sherkat 2014), this finding may reflect the persistently higher societal standing of “core” denominations as well as the rising status of New Pentecostalism. Defying our expectations, educational attainment was a strong predictor not only of joining/switching for personal reasons, in which the role of individual’s choice is probably greatest, but also of switching for marriage, where such a choice is arguably limited (although in the latter case the observed effect may speak more to the association between education and religious exogamy). Most unexpectedly, perhaps, schooling was significantly, even if modestly, related to the risk of switching for health reasons. Finally, education had a strong negative relationship with the likelihood of quitting and a positive association with church attendance, paralleling (with the aforementioned caveats) some findings in the US context (e.g. Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Schwadel 2011; Uecker et al. 2007). Because in the study setting affiliation with formal religion is normative and quitting is typically a pause before reaffiliation, one can also speculate that more educated individuals may be better able to withstand the psychological and social pressures associated with switching than less educated ones and therefore may not need to resort to intermediate disaffiliation. Additional qualitative research is needed to explore these dynamics.

In a broader sociological sense, our findings illustrate the connection between organized religion and modernity noted in many sub-Saharan and other developing settings (see e.g., Keane 2007; Van Der Veer 1996). They reflect the role and meaning of religion and religious affiliation in such settings as venues and conduits for novel spiritual expressions, identity formation, and solidarity building. Importantly, while these developing settings seem vastly distinct from the western world, their experiences of continuous religious quest and renewal are fundamentally similar to those observed in the West (cf., Mayrl and Oeur 2009; Roof 1999; Smith and Snell 2009; Wuthnow 2007). At the same time, our findings highlight the transformative meaning and implications of basic education across rural and small-town sub-Saharan Africa. Although African educational systems, especially at the primary level, do not necessarily build strong literacy and related skills (Smith-Greenaway 2015), they do seem to nurture cognitive and social qualities and create an environment that encourage and facilitate changes in aspirations and behavior. While the specific pathways through which women’s education may influence their religious mobility, and especially the role of decision-making autonomy vs. those of assortative mating or residential mobility, cannot be ascertained with our retrospective data, our key findings provide an impetus for future in-depth analyses of this complex relationship.

Our findings are based on a sample of women. Previous research in Mozambique has found that women greatly predominate among churchgoers (e.g., Agadjanian 1999; 2005; 2015), which is typical of the gender makeup of religious service attendees in Africa and many other predominantly Christian parts of the world, including many western societies (de Grotenhuis and Scheepers 2002; McFarland et al 2011: 177, 179; Pew Research Center 2016; Schwadel 2014: 13; Schwadel 2015:410). Moreover, as Brown’s (2012) historical account demonstrates, women’s involvement with religion has been particularly consequential for social and demographic change in western contexts. Although western

research has not produced any evidence of gender differences in the effects of education on religious switching (Loveland 2003: 153; Sandomirsky & Wilson 1990), we nonetheless acknowledge that in the study setting religious membership and switching are gendered phenomena with arguably different meanings and consequences for women and men, and therefore our results may not hold for men. Also importantly, in most sub-Saharan settings, where marriage is early and nearly universal, reaffiliation, even for health or personal reasons, is typically a couple-based decision. As with many other couple-based decisions and choices in patriarchal settings, where the man's word, or at least his presumed preference, are usually dominant, religious switching among women should be seen within the context of their marital partnerships and their partners' characteristics, which we cannot do fully with our data. Yet, we should also note that for rural and small-town African women, whose traditional productive and reproductive functions tend to confine them to the lineage-circumscribed social world, organized religion offers a rare channel and venue for non-traditional, lineage-unrelated social belonging and, by extension, of emotional, spiritual, and even civic expression (Agadjanian 2015). Moreover, religion is one of the few spheres of social life where women can exercise considerable agency and leadership (Agadjanian 2015; Agadjanian and Yabiku 2015). The dynamics of reaffiliation and disaffiliation that we examined in this study therefore not only illustrate the changing complexity of the religious landscape of this and similar sub-Saharan settings but also relate to fundamental transformations of its gender ideologies and hierarchies. While these interconnections lie beyond the scope of the current analysis, they offer an important frame of reference for a better understanding of religious mobility in the context of rapid, multifaceted, and profound social change and suggest directions for future research.

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Table 1.

Descriptive statistics by denominational affiliation (percent), Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| | Roman Catholic | Mainline Protestant | Zionist | Apostolic | New Pentecostal | All affiliated | Not affiliated |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>A. All women (N=2008)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Belonged to other churches before | 34.4 | 53.3 | 52.8 | 61.4 | 60.7 | 52.3 | 56.7 |
| Belonged to only one church before | 26.1 | 45.6 | 44.1 | 52.7 | 46.2 | 43.1 | 48.1 |
| Belonged to two or more churches before | 8.3 | 7.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 14.5 | 9.2 | 8.6 |
| Educational level | | | | | | | |
| No schooling | 14.6 | 23.1 | 39.0 | 26.6 | 28.1 | 30.7 | 56.2 |
| 1–4 years of schooling | 35.6 | 34.9 | 38.7 | 45.6 | 33.9 | 38.2 | 32.2 |
| 5 or more years of schooling | 49.8 | 42.1 | 22.3 | 27.8 | 38.0 | 31.1 | 11.6 |
| Number of cases | 253 | 195 | 865 | 241 | 221 | 1775 | 233 |
| Percent in sample | 12.6 | 9.7 | 43.1 | 12.0 | 11.0 | 88.4 | 11.6 |
| <i>B. Women with at least one previous affiliation (N=1061)</i> | | | | | | | |
| Educational level | | | | | | | |
| No schooling | 21.8 | 23.1 | 29.6 | 20.3 | 22.4 | 25.6 | 47.7 |
| 1–4 years of schooling | 34.5 | 39.4 | 43.4 | 50.7 | 39.6 | 42.7 | 36.4 |
| 5 or more years of schooling | 43.7 | 37.5 | 27.0 | 29.1 | 38.1 | 31.6 | 15.9 |
| Previous affiliation | | | | | | | |
| Roman Catholic | 1.2 ^a | 25.0 | 29.8 | 27.7 | 22.4 | 25.2 | 16.7 |
| Mainline Protestant | 24.1 | 15.4 | 14.7 | 16.2 | 11.2 | 15.4 | 12.1 |
| Zionist | 50.6 | 38.5 | 24.1 | 41.2 | 47.8 | 34.3 | 45.5 |
| Apostolic | 13.8 | 5.8 | 17.1 | 2.0 | 12.7 | 12.5 | 15.9 |
| New Pentecostal | 9.2 | 15.4 | 14.3 | 14.7 | 6.0 | 12.5 | 9.9 |
| Main reason for joining current church | | | | | | | |
| Marriage | 44.8 | 36.7 | 21.5 | 34.7 | 29.3 | 28.5 | n/a |
| Health | 0.9 | 9.5 | 60.2 | 45.7 | 21.0 | 42.0 | n/a |
| Personal preference or other | 54.3 | 53.7 | 18.3 | 19.6 | 49.7 | 29.5 | n/a |
| Number of cases | 87 | 104 | 456 | 148 | 134 | 929 | 132 |
| Percent | 11.9 | 9.8 | 43.0 | 13.9 | 12.6 | 87.6 | 12.4 |

Note:

^a one Catholic respondent who reported having rejoined the Catholic Church after a hiatus of several years.

Table 2.

Lifetime religious switching experience, Poisson regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | β (SE) |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| Education | |
| [No education] | |
| 1–4 years of school | .3107 (.0581)** |
| 5 or more years of school | .3125 (.0734)** |
| Denomination at time of survey | |
| [Roman Catholic] | |
| Mainline Protestant | .3855 (.1278)** |
| Apostolic | .5292 (.1290)** |
| Zionist | .4323 (.1126)** |
| New Pentecostal | .6008 (.1301)** |
| None | .5304 (.1356)** |
| Type of area of childhood | |
| [Rural] | |
| Urban | -.0929 (.0633) |
| Moving experience | |
| [Never moved since age 12] | |
| Moved at least once since age 12 | .1289 (.0530)* |
| Age | .0174 (.0187) |
| Age squared | -.0002 (.0003) |
| Intercept | -1.4534 (.3147)** |
| F-statistic | 5.86** |
| Number of cases | 2008 |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; ** <.01, * <.05, + <.10, two-tailed test.

Table 3.

Switching/joining church since age 12, discrete-time binomial logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | β (SE) |
|--|----------------------------|
| Education | |
| [No education] | |
| 1–4 years of school | .3650 (.0748)** |
| 5 or more years of school | .7768 (.0909)** |
| Denomination in previous year | |
| [Roman Catholic] | |
| Mainline Protestant | .0626 (.1624) |
| Apostolic | –.0660 (.1840) |
| Zionist | –.1472 (.1412) |
| New Pentecostal | .0245 (.1746) |
| None | 1.3567 (.1227)** |
| Type of area of childhood | |
| [Rural] | |
| Urban | .1405 (.0721) ⁺ |
| Switching/joining experience before current year | |
| [Never switched/joined church] | |
| Switched/joined church at least once | –.2000 (.0925)* |
| Age | .0631 (.0209)** |
| Age squared | –.0009 (.0004)* |
| Intercept | –5.0183 (.2473)** |
| F-statistic | 46.57** |
| Number of person-years | 35250 |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; ** <.01, * <.05, + <.10, two-tailed test.

Table 4.

Switching/joining church since age 12, by denominational destination of switching/joining, discrete-time multinomial logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | Switching to/joining to a Mainline church vs. not switching/not joining | Switching to/joining to a Apostolic church vs. not switching/not joining | Switching to/joining to a Zionist church vs. not switching/not joining | Switching to/joining to a Pentecostal church vs. not switching/not joining |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Education | | | | |
| [No education] | | | | |
| 1–4 years of school | .7560 (.2058) ** | .6173 (.1733) ** | .1235 (.0972) | .5457 (.2120) ** |
| 5 or more years of school | 1.6438 (.2326) ** | .5127 (.2055) * | .3678 (.1195) ** | 1.2281 (.1944) ** |
| Denomination in previous year | | | | |
| [Roman Catholic] | | | | |
| Mainline Protestant | .9766 (.3457) ** | –.0046 (.3805) | –.1354 (.2154) | –.4304 (.3843) |
| Apostolic | .7477 (.3490) * | –2.0812 (.7824) ** | .0017 (.2256) | –.2183 (.3704) |
| Zionist | .9755 (.2836) ** | –.0237 (.2804) | –.7966 (.1812) ** | .0541 (.3049) |
| New Pentecostal | .8535 (.3767) * | –.2111 (.3529) | –.1103 (.2145) | –.2607 (.4295) |
| None | 2.1774 (.2599) ** | .9075 (.1914) ** | 1.2024 (.1656) ** | 1.4146 (.2799) ** |
| Type of area of childhood | | | | |
| [Rural] | | | | |
| Urban | .0948 (.1523) | .0225 (.1732) | .2065 (.1006) * | .1145 (.1896) |
| Switching/joining experience before current year | | | | |
| [Never switched/joined church] | | | | |
| Switched/joined church at least once | –.3064 (.1850) | –.2905 (.2671) | –.2276 (.1178) † | .2150 (.2373) |
| Age | –.0195 (.0430) | .1356 (.0528) ** | .1055 (.0253) ** | .0179 (.0602) |
| Age squared | .0005 (.0009) | –.0030 (.0011) ** | –.0014 (.0005) ** | –.0001 (.0013) |
| Intercept | –6.7794 (.5539) | –6.9938 (.6390) ** | –6.0020 (.3345) | –6.7875 (.6833) ** |
| F-statistic | | | 14.90 ** | |
| Number of person-years | | | 35250 | |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; significance levels: ** <.01, * <.05, † <.10, two-tailed test.

Table 5.

Switching/joining church since age 12, by main reason of switching/joining, discrete-time multinomial logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | Switching to/joining for marriage vs. not switching/not joining | Switching to/joining for health reasons vs. not switching/not joining | Switching to/joining for personal preference/other reasons vs. not switching/not joining |
|--|---|---|--|
| Education | | | |
| [No education] | | | |
| 1–4 years of school | .4930 (.1426)** | .1164 (.1015) | .6173 (.1366)** |
| 5 or more years of school | 1.0334 (.1519)** | .2712 (.1248)* | 1.1744 (.1554)** |
| Denomination in previous year | | | |
| [Roman Catholic] | | | |
| Mainline Protestant | .3044 (.2217) | -.1751 (.2433) | -.0547 (.2780) |
| Apostolic | .3578 (.2375) | -.1946 (.2611) | -.5645 (.3383) ⁺ |
| Zionist | -.0738 (.1951) | -.4034 (.2056)* | .0872 (.2202) |
| New Pentecostal | -.0605 (.2428) | -.2175 (.2639) | .4158 (.2419) ⁺ |
| None | .5946 (.1475)** | 1.3389 (.1722)** | 2.0066 (.1913)** |
| Type of area of childhood | | | |
| [Rural] | | | |
| Urban | -.0986 (.1297) | .2805 (.1114)** | .1480 (.1069) |
| Switching/joining experience before current year | | | |
| [Never switched/joined church] | | | |
| Switched/joined church at least once | -.6985 (.1935)** | -.2792 (.1307)* | .3083 (.1408)* |
| Age | .4647 (.1029)** | .1428 (.0289)** | -.0938 (.0340)* |
| Age squared | -.0104 (.0024)** | -.0019 (.0006)** | .0020(.0007)** |
| Intercept | -9.8469 (1.0438)** | -6.9484 (.4126)** | -4.9554 (.4153)* |
| F-statistic | | 30.18** | |
| Number of person-years | | 35250 | |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; ** <.01, * <.05, + <.10, two-tailed test.

Table 6.

Quitting a church since age 12, discrete-time binomial logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), women with a religious affiliation at age 12, Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | β (SE) |
|--|-------------------|
| Education | |
| [No education] | |
| 1–4 years of school | –.1943 (.1262) |
| 5 or more years of school | –.5589 (.1465)** |
| Denomination in previous year | |
| [Roman Catholic] | |
| Mainline Protestant | .1420 (.1680) |
| Apostolic | –.0152 (.1823) |
| Zionist | –.1880 (.1676) |
| New Pentecostal | .1573 (.1633) |
| Type of area of childhood | |
| [Rural] | |
| Urban | –.1383 (.1395) |
| Switching/joining experience before current year | |
| [Never switched/joined church] | |
| Switched/joined church at least once | .3132 (.1422)* |
| Age | .0308 (.0478) |
| Age squared | –.0021 (.0010)* |
| Intercept | –3.3920 (.5330)** |
| F-statistic | 6.85** |
| Number of person-years | 24148 |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; ** <.01, * <.05, + <.10, two-tailed test.

Table 7.

Having attended church at least once in past two weeks, binomial logistic regression parameter estimates (standard errors in parentheses), women with a current religious affiliation, Chibuto Religious Survey, Mozambique

| Covariates | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Education | |
| [No education] | |
| 1–4 years of school | .3762 (.1250) ** |
| 5 or more years of school | .3783 (.1760) * |
| Denomination at time of survey | |
| [Roman Catholic] | |
| Mainline Protestant | .4089 (.2401) ⁺ |
| Apostolic | .5654 (.2063) ** |
| Zionist | .2453 (.1989) |
| New Pentecostal | .2642 (.2201) |
| Age | –.0034 (.0446) |
| Age squared | .0001 (.0007) |
| Marital partnership | |
| [Has no current partner] | |
| Has a current partner | –.0221 (.1301) |
| Number of living children | .0069 (.0378) |
| Employment outside subsistence agriculture | |
| [Does not work for income] | |
| Works for income | .2795 (.1265) * |
| Household material possessions scale | .0827 (.0639) |
| Type of area of childhood | |
| [Rural] | |
| Urban | –.0369 (.1273) |
| Recent church switching | |
| [Has been in current church for more than two years] | |
| Switched to current church in past two years | .2263 (.1545) |
| Formal post in church | |
| [Has no post] | |
| Has a post | .9613 (.2036) ** |
| Usual time traveled from residence to church (in min.) | –.0026 (.0015) ⁺ |
| Intercept | .1268 (.8012) |
| F-statistic | 3.32 ** |
| Number of cases | 1772 |

Notes: Reference categories in brackets; ** <.01, * <.05, ⁺ <.10, two-tailed test.