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Emancipation or Accommodation? Faith and Justice in a Globalized Africa

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ABSTRACT   *This article interrogates the meaning of 'justice' for religious actors in Africa, comparing the post-independence period to the contemporary one. The treatment and meaning of justice by these actors today differs in important ways from ideas about justice during previous generations' struggles for freedom. This is because (a) the promise of independence entailed a proactive, emancipatory and pan-African overhaul of oppressive and inegalitarian practices; while justice talk today occurs in a neoliberal context of more reactive and sometimes accommodationist measures to redress problems of violence and poverty; and (b) African leaders and religious thinkers themselves defined the meaning and components of justice in the past, while today much of the discourse around justice emanates from issues identified by transnational nongovernmental organizations and agencies. A neo-Weberian approach helps distill significant characteristics of the complex faith-justice-globalization relationship in these different periods, as well as their imbrication into religiously-plural and syncretic religious contexts.*

Keywords: justice, faith, neo-Weberianism, religious humanitarianism, neoliberalism, contextual theology

This article interrogates the meanings of 'justice' in Africa, focusing on its intersections with 'faith' (expressed through religious thinkers, scholars and groups) and processes of globalization (expressed primarily through interactions of various kinds with the 'global north'), from the post-independence period to the present. More specifically, I examine how 'justice talk' is constitutive of the political, economic and social contexts in which it operates: in its constitutive character, however, it can also create important points of contestation and rupture. This co-

constitution, I argue, has important implications for the vocation and work of religious actors on the continent, because it produces significant ethical struggles over 'liberation' versus 'accommodation' that have political implications.[1] I assert that the globalization of neoliberal forms of economic, political and bureaucratic governance differs considerably from the globalization of independence movements and their resulting anti- and post-colonial forms of governance of previous generations. The former encourages accommodation with its economic, political and bureaucratic manifestations, while the latter calls for (even if it does not necessarily achieve) systemic forms of change. How religious actors interpret the requirements of their faith in these contexts reveals both constraints and potential openings for understandings of justice.

The religious actors of concern here include primarily African Christian leaders and thinkers from mainline denominations (understood here as including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and some Anabaptist such as Mennonite and Quaker, but generally not including evangelical or Pentecostal churches). I also include some members of transnational mainline Christian denominations who have worked in Africa during either or both periods. Looking at how these actors understand justice sheds new light on the forms and implications of globalization in diverse parts of the world. These can include the globalization of different forms of Christianity and other religions as well as modes of governance (democracy, authoritarian governments, etc.), human rights, and modes of economic organization (capitalism, socialism, neo-liberalism, forms of communitarianism).

Conceptions of justice are critical to the ethics of religious actors, but these conceptions and the theologies that shape them can evolve and change. I employ a neo-Weberian framework to understand the meaning of justice for religious thinkers and groups in these different contexts, because this approach views religious ethics as constitutive of broader global social, economic, and political processes, but also as potentially offering new ethical possibilities. I focus here on the case of mainline Christians who attempt to enact justice in Africa, because Christianity in Africa has always been intimately tied to important processes of religious, political and economic globalization that have particular local ramifications, and the traditions of Catholicism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Methodism, Baptism, and several Anabaptist sects have established roots in much of sub-Saharan Africa that are one to several hundred years old.[2] This focus puts into perspective the intersections of an important globalized faith tradition – Christianity – that itself has many variants and permutations in Africa and elsewhere, with the ramifications of colonial and post-colonial as well as neoliberal forms of globalization. These intersections, I argue, have helped to shape and reshaped discourses of justice on the African continent in significant ways.

There are several caveats to this investigation. First, it rejects any use of 'Africa', 'faith/religion' or 'justice' as terms that reify by denoting a single kind of entity. The African continent is incredibly diverse in its social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, geographic, gender and historical compositions. As West African Methodist and feminist theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye asserts, '[w]riting about Africa is a hazardous enterprise' (Oduyoye, 1997–1998, p. 1). For some scholars, it is important to distinguish between northern and sub-Saharan Africa, while for others such a division is religiously as well as geographically problematic, vastly reducing the diversity and importance of Islam on the continent (Kane, 2016). The racial as well as economic and political history of South Africa, moreover, make it difficult to draw comparisons between it and the rest of Africa, yet the South African experience bears affinities as well as differences with those of other parts of the continent. My concern here, however, is to draw some general comparisons that provide new ways of thinking about processes of globalization through examining interpretations of faith and ethical goals such as justice. As a

result, and because of my focus on mainline Christianity, I draw from sources and events in sites in sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa in this analysis.

Likewise, I do not interrogate here the blurred lines between religion and secularism (Asad, 2009; Fitzgerald, 2003) or the historical origins of either the concept of religion in general, or those of Christianity in Africa (Isichei, 2004). But I do emphasize that the multiple forms that Christianity has taken on the continent over time have resulted from powerful connections with both transnational denominational movements and African religious beliefs and practices, and that these connections, along with the spread of a politics of emancipation in the late colonial era, and the expansion of neoliberalism since the 1990s, have shaped African Christian theologies of contextualism, liberationism, and inculturation, which are discussed below. The very act of interrogating different meanings of justice in this article gestures to at least some of the active contestation surrounding the term. My goal is to articulate these meanings and explicate significant components of this contestation over time.

Finally, in thinking about whether or not conceptions of justice are articulated, and if they are, what kinds of parameters they incorporate, I do not argue that religious ethics have ever produced a form of 'pure' or 'ideal' conception of justice. Instead, I want to understand the possibilities of and constraints on justice-talk among religious humanitarians today vis-à-vis the recent past.

I first outline the essential components of the 'neo-Weberian' approach to the study of religion in international politics, connecting significant contextual factors to religious ethics, especially in different African contexts. Second, I articulate important elements of the emancipatory ethics of the previous generation, comparing and contrasting them with conceptions of justice in contemporary Christian theologies, which are developed in the midst of globalized neoliberal discourses of aid, humanitarianism, and development. Finally, I articulate the similarities and differences among eras and ethics to identify several issues confronted by religious actors in promoting social, regional, and global justice today. I do not wish to reify what constitutes 'justice' in mainline Christianity; nor do I draw overly rigid boundaries between religious traditions or historical periods, but I do outline some of the major contextual differences that intersect with and shape interpretations of justice from the 1960s to the present. In order to do so, I draw from African theological sources, scholarly work, and interviews with both African and western Christians working on the continent.

A Neo-Weberian Approach to Religious Humanitarianism

The question of how religious actors interpret and enact justice is a prominent example of the insight that religious ethics are not unchanging. The term 'neo-Weberian' indicates an approach to analyzing religious beliefs and practices that sees them as constitutive of broader economic and political processes, as well as religious texts and traditions (Lynch, 2009). In other words, the approach focuses on how religious actors enact their ethics *in practice*, that is, how they interpret them in the exigencies of their times. Religious ethics, like all ethics, are constitutive of such local and global processes, and evolve with them, as Max Weber demonstrated so well in his seminal works (Weber, 1963/1991). But it is important to emphasize that in stating that religious ethics are constitutive of politics and economics, I am asserting that a mutual form of constitution is at work; that is, that religious ethics emanate from their spatial and temporal contexts, and conversely, that they may replicate or alter these contexts in varying degrees. These contexts are not all-determining, but they do influence the kinds of discursive practices of agents who replicate or challenge their forms of power through their interpretations and

actions. Indeed the discipline of hermeneutics developed in response to the constant need to interpret sacred texts in time and place (Ela, 1986; Jonsen & Toulmin, 1988; MacIntyre, 1990; Martey, 1996; Taylor, 2007). In many parts of Africa, as theologian Emmanuel Martey notes, engaging in the hermeneutical enterprise has been critical: 'Christians in Africa' sought 'new ways of interpreting not only Scripture but also the human condition in their own cultural and political settings' (Martey, 1996, p. 54). Such efforts enlarge the scope of the hermeneutical enterprise itself. As stated by Topper, 'The aim of hermeneutical investigation is to provide a reading or interpretation of the text that removes or mitigates its obscurity by disclosing its underlying meaning and coherence' (Topper, 2011, p. 1072). But any clarity gained does not resolve questions of meaning once and for all. As Martey indicates, as Christians in Africa attempt to uncover 'underlying meanings' of sacred texts and teachings for their own times and places, they also engage in questioning and debate regarding these meanings and their implicit or explicit methods for determining them (Martey, 1996).

Martey's work indicates why the neo-Weberian approach, understands religions as 'living traditions' (MacIntyre, 1990; Salvatore, 2007) instead of as repositories of static or ahistorical dogma. The guidelines provided by these traditions are translated through local/global encounters. Religious actors constantly interpret and reinterpret teachings, rituals and texts in order to meet their needs for living and acting in specific places and times. This is how, according to Martey, emancipatory theologies developed: approaches such as '"Africanization" and "liberation" in African theological discourse are hermeneutic procedures that seek to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ to the contemporary African in the light of the African condition' (1996, p. 55).

Moreover, religious actors interpret the requirements of their faith traditions to try to achieve particular conceptions of the 'common good' that become dominant in given spatial and temporal contexts (Salvatore, 2007). Important trends in mainline Christianity in Africa, for example, draw on African cosmologies about communal good as well as the individual and community's place in a 'cosmic wholeness' (Mandela, cited by Oduyoye, 1997–1998, p. 2); some also relate these ideas explicitly to the common good (e.g. Schutte, 2009, pp. 380–381). Along these lines, Oduyoye details multiple ways (through naming rituals, libations, etc.) in which Akan and Yoruba ontologies prioritize God 'at work' in the cosmos, and finds that 'when ideals like unity, community, caring, faithfulness, excellence, steadfastness, etc., abound . . . we experience God' (Oduyoye, 1997–1998, p. 4). Such conceptions of the 'common good' are intimately bound up with ideals of justice, as Oduyoye explains: 'ultimately God is on the side of the weak and the side of justice' (Oduyoye, 1997–1998, p. 4).

Yet how the common good and justice are enacted in any 'living tradition' is critical. Many African writers and religious thinkers explore notions of 'Ujamaa' (the idea of family or 'brotherhood' that became Nyerere's touchstone for Tanzanian socialism in the 1967 Arusha Declaration), 'Ubuntu' (the idea encapsulated by the phrase 'I am because you are'), and 'terenga' (the Senegalese obligation regarding hospitality to friends and strangers alike) among others to describe and explicate the connection among ideals of common good and notions of symbiotic interconnections with others. While there is an ongoing debate about whether these and other related concepts become romanticized in the attempt to accord them their due in various African ways of living (Akua Anyidoho, 2008), they frequently recur in the work of African thinkers and theologians (see, for example, many of the contributions in the edited volume by Murove, 2009). The actions that result from commitment to these ideals – including both intentional and habitual practices – are constitutive of political and economic processes that mark historical time and geographic – including globalized – space.

As religious actors figure out the requirements of their faith in order to act, they engage in 'popular casuistry'. The term casuistry is from the medieval Catholic tradition of using selected precedents to determine what constitutes ethical action in specific cases (Jonsen & Toulmin, 1988). Popular casuistry refers to how religious actors make sense of their everyday situations, look to some precedents and not others, and thus interpret the requirements of their faith to decide what kinds of action are ethical in particular circumstances, to advance where possible their understanding of the common good. In different parts of Africa, the work of popular casuistry in the mainline theologies of interest here includes figuring out how to interpret Christian tenets and texts while also deciding whether and how to respect rituals and beliefs such as venerating ancestors, pouring libations, and integrating cosmologies that tend to unify 'the natural and the supernatural' (Mandela, quoted in Oduyoye, 1997–1998, p. 2).

A neo-Weberian framework, then, requires analysis of how the 'living tradition' of a religion responds to and shapes its spatial and temporal context, how adherents define the 'common good' they seek to attain, and how they interpret and act on that common good through processes of 'popular casuistry'. Regarding justice vis-à-vis Africa, a neo-Weberian framework encourages us to look at how context shapes and enables certain kinds of justice claims and actions, and how religious actors employ and legitimize these claims to meet their interpretations of their needs, potentially also challenging the parameters of the very contexts which they interpret.

Faith and In/Justice Regarding Africa

Neo-Weberianism helps demonstrate the continuities and ruptures in interpretations of the requirements of justice from the period of decolonization to the present. From the 1960s to the early 1990s, Christian ethics in Africa generally related in some way to various forms of pan-Africanism, nationalism, and ongoing challenges to colonial era social, economic, and political structures and systems. While accommodationism with transnational religious denominations clearly existed (the Kenyan Catholic hierarchy, according to Gifford, was 'almost slavishly subservient to Rome'), other theo-political ethics called for clear breaks with colonial-era practices and denominational control (Gifford, 2009, p. 42). Julius Nyerere, for example, who was a Christian, African socialist and the first President of independent Tanzania, insisted that 'the Church must work with the people in the positive task of building social justice . . . it is important that we should stress the working *with,* not the working *for*' (Isichei, 1995, p. 326). Leopold Senghor, first President of independent Senegal who was also a Catholic and former seminarian in a Muslim-majority country, drew inspiration from French thinker Jacques Maritain and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, but also critiqued 'the divorce existing between the doctrine and the life of European Christians, between Christ's work and Christian acts' (Isichei, 1995, p. 339).

Political and economic contextual factors that shaped these ethics centered on overthrowing the violence of colonialism and racism, or what the All-African Conference of Churches called 'the African Revolution' (Martey, 1996, p. 7). From the late 1950s to the early 1960s, most of colonized Sub-Saharan Africa became independent, with the exception of Mozambique and Angola (1975), Zimbabwe (1980), and Namibia (1990). Although South Africa retained its notorious apartheid system until the early 1990s, the growth of the anti-apartheid movement and the African National Congress (ANC) paralleled but also differed from other emancipatory movements across the continent (Sharawy, 2014, pp. 142–143). Leaders of independence struggles, including Christians like Nyerere and Senghor, those with Christian backgrounds

including Kwame Nkrumah, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, as well as many other religious leaders and thinkers, framed justice debates in terms of emancipation from unjust foreign oppression (or white oppression in Zimbabwe and South Africa) and extraction of Africa's wealth to colonial powers. (Other leaders with Christian backgrounds, however, including Félix Houphuet-Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, did the opposite, siphoning enormous sums of money into lavish personal lifestyles.)

While the stories are multiple and complex, the independence struggles on the continent did not produce full emancipation from foreign political and economic interests, which continued to exercise economic control through multinational firms and international economic institutions, and political control by intervening militarily to support authoritarian leaders. Foreign and domestic Cold War coalitions assassinated or deposed many leaders who made these justice claims and challenged external control, from Patrice Lumumba of Congo in the early days of independence to Thomas Sankara of Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) in the 1980s, and replaced them with others who were more favorable to their economic and political interests. The US and other western powers' Cold War anti-communist rhetoric raised suspicions about these leaders and others, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and the leaders of the ANC who were fighting apartheid in South Africa. Throughout the Cold War, often bloody external military interventions (Congo, Chad, Biafra/Nigeria, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, among others) continued to create or shore up leaders friendly to former colonial or US interests. The ongoing extraction of wealth from the continent made economic redistribution difficult if not impossible, and poverty increased with rising debt and badly-conceived and executed Structural Adjustment Policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s. These policies mandated cuts in social spending to repay debt, which impoverished more people, also reversing in many cases advances that had been made in education and health care (Ferguson, 2006; Mbembe, 2001; Ninsin, 2012; Okyerefo, 2016).

The complex relationship between faith/ religion and justice during this period is an interesting one, producing strong theologies that connected justice to ending colonialism on the continent and apartheid in South Africa, rejecting the corresponding legal and economic systems of unjust appropriation that continued in the postcolonial era, and recovering African religious practices and beliefs suppressed by both Christian and colonial authorities.

Achieving the common good meant creating structures founded on independence, equality, and economic redistribution, but also on the respect for and inclusion of African religious practices, values, and ways of life. For mainline Christians, the 1970s and 1980s were heydays of such justice discourses, epitomized by the development of 'contextual theology' in Southern Africa, and forms of 'inculturation' and 'liberation theology' in Ghana, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Kenya, and elsewhere (Isichei, 1995; Mayemba, 2016). These sometimes mirrored and other times preceded the development of liberation theology in Latin America, but in either case, took on distinctly African components (Gottlieb, 2003; Hopkins & Antonio, 2012). The term 'contextual theology', which emanates from Southern Africa, refers to an emancipatory trend in African Christianity that focuses on interpreting the meaning and requirements of Christian action beginning from a focus on local, including indigenous African, as well as continent-wide aspects of daily life or 'lived reality'. 'Inculturation', a term made salient by Martey, Ela and others, refers more specifically to the necessity of understanding, celebrating and fully integrating African 'culture' (whether or not seen as religious) into the central beliefs and practices of Christianity in Africa. 'Liberation' refers to an emancipatory economic and political teleology which Martey connected to inculturation. It was also adopted by African feminist theologians to call for gender equality in the churches as well as in society and politics.

Feminist constructions of justice and emancipation became extremely influential in African contextual and liberation theologies, especially during the 1980s and 1990s. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, founded in the 1980s in West Africa, eventually included feminist theologians from South Africa, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Malawi, among other African countries (Jenkins, 2006, p. 163; Phiri & Nadar, 2006). The Circle criticized the injustices perpetuated by patriarchal interpretations of theology as well as patriarchal systems of social and political power bred by both colonialism and African cultural norms, contrasting them with both African and Christian counterexamples (matrilineal societies, values of wholeness and unity, the example of Jesus in accepting all women as equals under God), and connecting them to theo-political demands for transformation. Members of the Circle included scholar-activists who produced numerous theological studies (including Dube, 2001; Oduyoye, 1995; Phiri, 1997/2007, among many others).

The Circle members called for addressing patriarchy within as well as outside of religious traditions; they and other Christian contextual thinkers also envisioned rethinking the role and ethics of the Church itself. Jean-Marc Ela of Cameroon, for example, called for reinventing the Church in Africa. For Ela, like these others, theological struggle had to be founded on the everyday lives and concrete experiences of Africans in ways that brought forward 'the memory and resistance of our people' (Ela, in Katongole, 2011, p. 102). This kind of 'shade tree theology' – reflecting on the everyday in ways designed to highlight, instead of ignore, African resistances to exploitation and oppression – exposed the limits and 'false universality' of European missionary Christianity, which Ela called 'moribund Constantinian Christianity', in the African context. Popular casuistry, for Ela, entailed rethinking the practice of faith through recovering memory and resistance, while grounding reflection in daily experiences of work and suffering. This rethinking would change the Church in Africa. It would also enable it to take its part in creating 'another society, another humanity, another system of production, another style of living together' (Ela, 1988/2009, p. 84; also in Katongole, 2011, p. 109). According to Emmanuel Katongole, 'The full extent of Ela's critical and constructive proposals . . . is to see Christianity as a determinative form of political engagement within which notions like liberation and justice might be completely redefined' (Ela, 1988/2009, p. 154; in Katongole, 2011, pp. 107–108). This cultural and religious redefinition and recreation, then, were essential components of the common good to be achieved in Africa.

Debates about indigenization and inculturation existed on the continent since the mission period, and resulted in very different contexts than those of the then-almost exclusively Catholic Latin America. Unlike in Latin America, the churches in Africa only became 'indigenized' during the second half of the twentieth century, as African clergy, priests, nuns took over from their mission counterparts from the global north. Soon after colonization and into the early part of the twentieth century, African religious leaders who insisted on the importance and validity of local practices founded numerous African Initiated Churches (AICs, with the 'I' also standing for Independent, Indigenous, or Instituted; see, for example, Chitando & Manyonganise, 2011, p. 79), many of which continue today in different parts of the continent (South Africa, Kenya, Congo, Zimbabwe, etc.). AICs also informed both contextual and liberation understandings of the importance of inculturation in subsequent mainline Christian theologies. Conversely, some African leaders drew on Christian imagery and texts to promote nationalist and pan-African claims. One example was that of Kwame Nkrumah, who refashioned, to the consternation of some Christian leaders, a well-known biblical injunction to meet nationalist and pan-African needs: 'Seek ye first the political Kingdom, and all things shall be added unto you' (Isichei, 1995, p. 339; Kane, 2016, p. 1).

While contextual and liberation theologians did not all agree on whether and what forms of inculturation could form part of Christian practice and belief, an integral component of both was the idea that religious doctrine could not be conceived of as 'fixed'. Rather, one's religious commitments and socio-historical situation or context *had to be interpreted* in order for the community of faith to understand what kinds of action were ethically required. Contextual and liberation-inculturation theologies highlighted hermeneutic traditions and interpretations of Christian texts and ethics, and African cosmologies, that promoted emancipation. God in these contexts acts 'in history' (instead of in a future life) and is concerned with turning injustice into social justice. Achieving social justice would realize the common good. The resulting popular casuistry exhorted practitioners to be in 'solidarity' with those suffering injustices, 'walk with' the 'poor and marginalized', and live out commitments to overturning 'structures' (political/military, economic, and cultural-religious) of oppression and poverty. It also concerned 'a critical approach to the problem of faith from a point of departure in the African culture, politics and economics that permeate them' (Ela, 1986, p. 8). These approaches oriented the popular casuistry of those influenced by contextual and liberationist perspectives.

This is not to say that all Christian thinkers in Africa became contextualists or inculturation-liberationists, or interpreted the requirements of justice in the same way, resulting in multiple tensions within mainline religious traditions themselves (Gifford, 2009; Jenkins, 2006). Such theologies of resistance and change did, however, connect many local, national and transnational actors, whose struggles intersected and in some cases mutually informed each other. These included the civil rights movement and the development of Black Theology in both South Africa and the US, although there were also differences (Ela, 1986, p. 107; Marable, 2011). Liberationists in Latin America also joined with those in Africa and Asia to create a new, transnational group, the Ecumencial Association of Third World Theologians, to challenge the Christian action and ethics promoted by colonialism and develop theologies rooted in their own experiences (Jenkins, 2006, p. 163; Martey, 1996, pp. 107–108).

The reception of contextual and liberationist ethics by western mainline Christians, including those working in Africa, was mixed, reflecting ethical tensions and different understandings of the authenticity and doctrinal power of European Christianity in processes of popular casuistry. For example, the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1966 held a major conference 'on religion and society, when they developed the theology of *revolution*'. However, this kind of theology was strongly contested, so much so that 'in two or three days' it was changed '[to] a theology of *development* . . . because of the Western community who did not understand the word revolution' (personal communication, July 2008). It was not until the 1990s that the WCC began a sustained investigation into critiques of Euro-centric Christian theologies. By then, the critique had gained enough resonance that the WCC engaged in a study of 'Gospel and culture'. This engagement entailed questioning the Christian missionary past, leading to 'a new awareness . . . of the negative aspects of missionary expansion in close association with colonial expansion' (Ariarjah, 1994, pp. xii, 2–3; Lynch, 2000). Contextual and liberationist theologies, then, insisted on confronting the ongoing and systemic inequities that bred injustices in the postcolonial period. How these injustices should be confronted through theology and action – determining the contours of the common good and the processes of popular casuistry to work toward it – became a matter of discussion and debate among many religious thinkers of the global north as well as the global south (Tschuy, 1997). The differing reactions of western Christians from mainline denominations who were working in Africa is illustrative of this debate. Isichei points out that some resisted liberationism, especially when connected to inculturation, while others embraced it (Isichei, 1995, p. 330).

In sum, contextual and liberationist-inculturation Christian theologies during this period became well-known in many parts of the continent. They highlighted the necessity of interpreting one's religious tradition, promoted systemic – and syncretic – political, economic and social change that confronted structures of neo-colonialism, patriarchy and religion alike, and engaged in popular casuistry by engaging in theological innovations and new forms of Christian and African syncretisms, as well as political action against neo-colonial economic and political power. Western Christians from mainline denominations had mixed reactions to these theologies, some challenging and condemning them, while others embracing a supporting role in the struggles that such theologies represented. The implications of these struggles and ethical interpretations continue to reverberate in contemporary religious debates, but they have also been complicated by new contextual developments, addressed in the next section.

Ethics and Theologies in a Time of Neoliberal Developmentalism

The end of the Cold War ushered in an era of lessened ideological competition among dominant powers. It also left the US and former colonial powers increasingly dominant economically in Africa. Smoothing the way for 'markets' and 'investment' to operate with the minimum constraints possible everywhere in the world underpinned the new globalized ideology, which became known as 'neoliberalism' (Harvey, 2007). In Africa, the result was 'private indirect government', in which international creditors effectively managed state functions, including 'credit control, implementing privatizations, laying down consumption requirements, determining import policies, agricultural programs, and cutting costs' (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 67, 74).

New and old conflicts (e.g. in Sudan, Somalia, the DRC and Rwanda) and worsening poverty exacerbated injustices in many parts of Africa. International institutions such as the IMF and World Bank (and their dominant members, especially the US), continued to demand spending reductions, and did not monitor sufficiently whether or not their funds ended up in the pockets of corrupt elites. State debts grew while populations suffered. Moreover, violence itself was increasingly privatized. Mbembe, for example, charges that economic and military privatization are intimately linked:

> leaving aside variations from one sub-region to another, one characteristic of the historical sequence unfolding in Africa is *the direct link ... between, on the one hand, deregulation and the primacy of the market, and, on the other, the rise of violence and the creation of private military, paramilitary, or jurisdictional organizations.* (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 78–79, emphasis in the original)

One significant phenomenon that paralleled these developments was the growth and solidification of 'the humanitarian international', a complex of private and public actors, mostly from the global north although increasingly diverse in recent years, who form part of 'the larger aid and development industry' (DeWaal, 1997/2009, p. 65). The explosive rise and influence of the humanitarian international, including the expansion of NGOs in Africa, has been charted by numerous commentators (Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Bond, 2005; Ferguson, 2006; Mutua, 2009). Both African scholars and others from outside the continent frequently note the imbrication of this complex into neoliberal forms of governance, including fashioning economic, political, and socio-cultural programs to meet external concerns about democracy-building, the creation of markets and 'sustainable growth', and the rights of women and children (Aina & Moyo, 2013; Akua Anyidoho, 2012; Kanyinga, 2009; Ngondi-Houghton, 2009). In practical terms, the locus of development and democracy discourse, previously the purview of African independence leaders and governments, has become increasingly situated in donor capitals

and transnational NGO headquarters. As Connie Ngondi-Houghton asserts, 'African civil society' (an entity that is supposed to lead efforts for good governance and human rights) is 'too dependent on donors. This influence extends to how NGOs network, develop advocacy strategies, and form their identity and political consciousness' (Ngondi-Houghton, 2009, p. 157). Local NGO affiliates and partners of transnational organizations are too often left to implement instead of conceptualize and lead programs that are supposed to address injustices in their own societies, despite the goal of developing partnerships (Autesserre, 2014; *passim*). Ngondi-Houghton, in a volume on NGOs in East Africa, asks rhetorically, 'Whatever happened to the popular democracy that Kenyans had struggled for in the 1970s?' (2009, p. 161).

The rapid rise and spread of Pentecostal and evangelical Christian movements across the continent intersects with these contextual developments. Scholars have noted (in different ways) the affinities of Pentecostal and evangelical beliefs and practices with neoliberal economic relations (Freeman, 2012; Okyerefo, 2011). Others have explored the development of 'progressive Pentecostalism' into the NGO world of aid, including in Africa (Miller & Yamamori, 2007); while still others critique the wealth accumulated by Pentecostal and evangelical leaders in both megachurches and governments (Obadere, 2016; Okyerefo, 2016). In addition, major denominations such as Catholicism became more overtly socially and politically conservative, especially under the leadership of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In such an environment, the meaning of morality (as well as justice) became constrained to particular issues, such as sexuality and condemnation of gay rights. For example, Emmanuel Katongole begins his recent discussion of 'pressing moral issues' with a disclaimer and a plea: he first rejects the idea that such issues must concern sexuality first and foremost, stating that, '[t]he presupposition that these issues relate to sexuality and sexual ethics poses a fundamental problem'. Instead, he argues in favor of a very different starting point, the 'sociological reality of the African church'. This starting point requires, he argues, foregrounding 'the pressing social and existential challenges that confront millions of Africans on a daily basis' (Katongole, 2016, pp. 161, 164). In other words, it requires highlighting issues of structural change.

Katongole's lament, then, reflects changes in both the discursive and structural contexts of contemporary mainline Christian theology in Africa. Comprehensive understandings of justice that challenge unjust globalized political, economic, gender and religious structures have in many cases become parsed into calls for rights (either in favor of identities like LGBT or, conversely, in favor of 'religious freedom' against the groups advocating for LGBT rights), 'restorative justice' after conflicts, punitive justice for perpetrators of corruption and human rights violations, or forms of social redress that emphasize specific aspects of structural problems, such as gender violence, educational deficits or attention to specific health epidemics (Orobator, 2011).

This discursive context is constitutive of evolutions in the structural relationships of mainline Christian denominations in Africa with external actors. In the early postcolonial period, mainline Christian leaders had to address the question of African leadership and control, posing the question, 'Would the missions become churches even as the colonies were becoming nations?' (Otieno & McCullum, 2005, p. 19). African churches remained dependent on transnational denominational funders. As Otieno and McCullum point out, 'The difficulties of achieving independence from powerful overseas churches led some African church leaders in the early 1970s to call for a moratorium on sending overseas money and personnel to Africa'. They quote an African Christian leader of the time, who noted, 'the strategy of determining Africa's priorities from outside Africa is the bane of the ecumenical movement on our continent' (Otieno & McCullum, 2005, p. 19).

It is unclear that African churches ever succeeded in distancing themselves from external financing and control. Nevertheless, in the contemporary neoliberal era, the sources of outside funding have expanded beyond transnational denominations to include numerous additional donors for mainline Christian schools, health clinics and hospitals (many founded during the mission era). External donors – public and private – also identify and fund newer and ever-expanding programs for post-conflict reconciliation, HIV/AIDS prevention, gender mainstreaming, and other work. 'Partnership' has become the watchword, even if both transnational aid workers and local NGOs (including church programs) complain that genuinely egalitarian relationships rarely exist (Autesserre, 2014; Ngondi-Houghton, 2009). Christian educational institutions and health clinics, for example, which are part of the mixed and layered legacy of mission (see, for example, Kumalo, 2012), are supported by funding from donor government agencies and numerous transnational NGOs as well as their transnational denominations (personal communications, Buea, Cameroon, 2006; Nairobi, Kenya, 2007; Yaounde, Cameroon, 2013). And Otieno and McCullum assert that, today, '[t]he challenges facing Africa require a wide range of partnerships with a shared commitment to create a better future for Africans, especially children and young people'. These partnerships include relationships 'between sectors in Africa and abroad – business people, educators, students, health professionals, philanthropists. All of them are goodwill ambassadors active in the future in Africa' (Otieno & McCullum, 2005, p. 111).

Practically, this means that religious actors are subject, in varying degrees, to the same developmentalist logic that shapes the globalized humanitarian industry as a whole. For example, Hopgood and Vinjamuri (2012) coined the concept of FBOs' 'faith in markets', and Scherz (2014) explicated Christians' use of 'sustainability' in the Ugandan context. Developmentalist logic also informs the increasing need for ever-more-sophisticated designs for metrics and modes of measurement of success or failure in individual programs to further forms of justice (Merry, 2016; Strathern, 2000). Otieno and McCullum, for example, note that the WCC 'hosted more and more "round tables" between donors and ecumenical groups'. These exposed 'a seeming lack of transparency and accountability' which 'was hampering the ability of the churches and related institutions to access needed money for their work and projects' (Otieno & McCullum, 2005, p. 109). As a result, the WCC worked with donors, accountants, auditors, and other professionals to develop handbooks and materials on common accounting standards for the churches to use in their funding appeals and implementation (Otieno & McCullum, 2005).

From the late 1990s to the present, therefore, justice morphed from systemic challenges to more specific, issue-based meanings, often geared to techniques and programs of action within given societies rather than challenging the injustices of the broader discourses and structures within which societies are embedded. In other words, justice today is infused by logics of 'assistance' – both emergency assistance and 'development' assistance, frequently enacted or financially supported by outsiders, and by ideas of 'expediency', 'efficiency', and 'sustainability' (Lynch, 2011). In important ways, this evolution is unsurprising, reflecting the range of problems faced when emancipatory ideals run into internal and external obstacles. But it is important to emphasize here, because it helps to elucidate important aspects of the faith-justice-globalization nexus in Africa in the past vis-à-vis the present. The content of the common good, therefore, changed, narrowing from a call for systemic justice that linked African issues with colonial legacies and postcolonial injustices, to calls for specific kinds of actions that advanced development and peaceful relations *within* individual societies, or forms of poverty reduction, education and health care that are to be achieved through external partnerships.

Two caveats are in order, however. While I argue that we can see this shift across Christian denominations on the continent, local, regional and denominational differences remain. For example, there tend to be broad differences in the way in which Catholic and Protestant groups operate (see, for example, Lynch & Schwarz, 2017), and multiple differences among mainline Protestant groups and their more evangelical branches. There are also local and regional nuances, shaped by linguistic, economic, political and historical factors and contexts. Nevertheless, just as both Catholic and Protestant theologian-activists spearheaded the articulation of justice within the liberationist and contextual developments of the previous post-independence era, both Catholic and Protestant organizations have to cope with the presence and power across the continent of transnational donors and their requirements in the present.

The second caveat concerns the work and insights of Christian African theologians today. While many have not given up on addressing systemic injustices, the parameters of their appeals have tended to alter given the contemporary globalized context of developmentalism. Elias Omondi Opongo, for example, merges the systemic with the domestic, in an acknowledgement of changed circumstances. He states, 'The Church in Africa today is faced with complex interactive systems of injustice', which include 'unsustainable global economic systems that often disadvantage the poor; internal conflicts that are ethnic, religious, or resource based; and poor governance' (Opongo, 2011, pp. 73–74). Opongo also charges that development-based 'solutions' are often problematic, the global financial crisis has had repercussions across the continent, and the role of foreign governments and multinational corporations is problematic, as is the cost of corruption (Opongo, 2011, pp. 73–74). Opongo, moreover, calls for the Church 'to be more prophetic' (instead of 'reactive') in the face of these problems, which requires it to participate 'in the daily struggles of the people to bring positive change for sustainable peace' (Opongo, 2011, p. 75). In this contribution as well as his 2007 book, *Faith Doing Justice,* Opongo relates the specific issues of corruption, economic rights such as land, housing and just wages, human rights and health care vis-à-vis HIV/AIDS and other diseases, among others, to a broader vision of justice that addresses these issues in a comprehensive manner (Opongo, 2007). Similarly, feminist theologians of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians continue to find new ways to relate health and other concerns to broader emancipatory visions of justice that prioritize changing unjust structures, including systems of both patriarchy and internal and external exploitation, and highlight African women's practices and experiences (Phiri & Nadar, 2006). And Katongole (2011), in foregrounding the theological and political work of Jean-Marc Ela and Thomas Sankara, among others, issues a potent reminder of the phenomenological as well as prophetic role of calls for structural change.

Equally important, contemporary appeals to justice by mainline Christians in Africa frequently return to African cosmologies to emphasize the crucial role of environmental stewardship in comprehensive understandings of justice. In this domain, African thinkers and African populations have always exercised leadership, although external groups have not necessarily recognized it. But there is evidence of a new emphasis on 'eco-justice' as a core link between challenging forms of exploitation and working for the common good. Obaji Agbiji, for example, demonstrates how Christian leaders in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria are focusing on eco-justice in the face of poverty and environmental degradation (Agbigi, 2015). Such challenges by Christians in Nigeria and elsewhere to neo-colonial forms of injustice against the environment can provide an important new articulation of the meaning of justice for Africans today (see also Katongole, 2016, pp. 169–170).

Each of these articulations of justice attempts to address the various impacts of systemic economic pressures and the postcolonial institutionalization of political and religious leaders who are

complicit in the ongoing violence against African populations, African land, and other African resources. Whether and how these appeals to processes of dialogue, pluralism, respect for the earth, and compassion can challenge the contemporary mix of local and global injustices, however, remains an ongoing question. The work of mainline Christian African theologians, then, remains extremely important in articulating ideals of justice and the common good. Nevertheless, they operate today in a context in which much of the discourse and funding regarding economic and political and social programs and objectives for Africa has moved away from the continent. This globalized context influences their theologies and processes of popular casuistry for addressing the material as well as religious needs of African Christians.

Conclusions

Justice has numerous connotations in religious (and secular) ethics, although a common denominator is the reference to a normative vision of what society and politics should look like. Such normative visions generally concern fairness of treatment (political and social), and/or distribution of resources and wealth (economic justice).

When we add processes of globalization in Africa to the mix, however, anxieties arise about how these visions become distorted through ever-expanding but unequal relations of power, adding increasingly painful *in*justices perpetuated by those with more power (economic, political, social, theological) vis-a-vis those who have less. There is, of course, a wide range of potential outcomes regarding visions of how to overcome such injustices, and what justice might entail in these visions in terms of concrete moral sensibilities and actions.

Whether and how justice is articulated as a primary goal for religious actors in Africa *matters* because theological articulations help to determine whether and how religious groups consciously or unconsciously challenge or acquiesce in political, economic, and religio-cultural systems of power, and whether they are able to articulate ideas of the common good that prioritize comprehensive or more specific commitments to justice.

Changing interpretations of justice in aid to and in Africa, therefore, are constitutive of broader social, political and economic dynamics. The neo-Weberian approach provides guidelines to elicit the contours of these dynamics, along with interpretations of the common good and the processes of popular casuistry that result. The previous generation identified justice with theologies of pan-African freedom, recovery, and emancipation while taking into account the specificities of multiple African contexts. The end of the Cold War, however, has produced new casuistic processes, that suggest greater pressures to focus on the kinds of local and domestic grievances of interest to transnational actors, or that exhibit hermeneutical tensions between interpretations of the local vis-a-vis the global as sites of injustices.

Contextual and liberationist theologians in Africa sought to achieve transformation for Africans in favor of the common good; today's African theologians also seek forms of transformation, but in a very different context. Debates about the content and meaning of justice matter because they reflect the concerns of religious actors, and indicate the parameters of what they believe is possible to attain in the world and 'in history'. Contextualizing and examining Christian theological debates in Africa over time reveals many of these parameters, and highlights important questions for contemporary religious actors regarding whether their ethics, theologies and programs represent political, economic, and/or theological emancipation, accommodation, or a combination of the two to systems of power in their search for justice.

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Notes

1   The opposition between emancipation (or liberation) and accommodation comes from Farid Esack. While a South African Muslim scholar, Esack's work refers to the dilemma of religious actors of all faiths in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid.
2   I refer here to explorer and missionary Christianity, not to the existence of Coptic Christian communities in Ethiopia and Egypt, which date from the first century CE.

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