# Editorial
# Critical Perspectives on Governance, Religion and Humanitarian Aid in Africa

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Religion is a major force in the governance of countries in contemporary Africa. At the same time, religion is a major motivating factor for the growth of humanitarianism, be it directed at Africa by other people of goodwill and organizations from other continents, or by Africans at one another and out-siders. Given that religion plays an important part in the lives, including the physical as well as mental wellbeing of the people of the continent, any serious study concerned with the continent cannot avoid its impact on many aspects of African life, including development, humanitarianism, and governance. As a result, the 'Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa' (CIHA) Blog (www.cihablog.com) held a conference in fall 2016 at Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS), Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, to explore these issues. Jointly organized by CIHA, the SMMS, and the University of Kwa-

Zulu-Natal (UKZN), the conference theme 'Religion, Governance and Humanitarianism in Africa' was structured around the question: 'How does Humanitarianism Interface with Religion in Contemporary Africa?'

This theme intersects with the mission of the CIHA Blog[1]. The CIHA Blog's focus on humanitarianism in Africa draws particular attention to critical and religious voices, in seeking 'to transform the phenomenon of aid to Africa into egalitarian and respectful relationships that challenge unequal power relations, paternalism and victimization' (from the CIHA Mission Statement).

Professor Cheryl Potgieter, the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the College of Humanities at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, highlighted in her opening conference address the role that religion plays in governance in Africa and interrogated the consequences of this corroboration. However, she also emphasized the need for governance to be free of narrow-minded religious and sectarian influences. This potential paradox – how to acknowledge and respect religious influences in a deeply pluralist way without allowing exclusivist forms of sectarianism – is one of the key issues that runs through several chapters of this volume, including those on the history of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa; religion, governance and restrictions on homosexuality; and religion in Eswatini, among others.

Other key issues include the role of African religions and progressive African values in both humanitarian governance and leadership disputes across the continent. The role of Christian and Muslim groups are examined in reference to governance for peace in Liberia as well as governance of socio-economic welfare in South Africa. However, it is also critical to examine the relative impact of religious activism versus that of women's organisations in the Liberian conflict, and the importance of leadership by shack-dwellers in South Africa instead of faith-based groups in working for the shack-dwellers' emancipation, instead of following 'top-down' strategies designed by both government and faith-based agencies. In each of these cases, religious identities became subservient to those of gender and/or class, raising broader inter-sectional issues for ongoing research. Methodologically, the contributions to this volume represent a range of approaches and theoretical orientations, from strongly postcolonial critiques of humanitarianism to orientations that accept

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[1] Like the conference itself, the CIHA Blog draws scholars from a variety of fields, including Politics, African Studies, Gender Studies, History, Religion and Theology, and Comparative Literature, among others.

the need for humanitarian aid and that query the forms and motivations of paternalistic interventions. Geographically, while a plurality of contributions focus on South Africa in particular, others engage debates about humanitarianism and religion in Uganda, Liberia, DRC, and the continent as a whole.

All of the contributions, however, address the multifaceted contributions and tensions involved in the nexus between religion and governance. Because they also represent extremely significant approaches to the debates in question, the Editorial team of CIHABlog.com decided to share papers presented at the conference, as well as others by scholars who could not attend, with the readers of the *Alter*nation African Scholarship Book Series (AASBS). All contributions in this volume, were peer-reviewed.

The Editorial Team is convinced that this volume captures robust and productive conversations that advance knowledge about the multifarious intersections among religion, governance and humanitarianism in Africa. These conversations, as described in the chapter previews below, reveal both convergences and divergences among initiatives emanating from religion, governance and humanitarian intersections.

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**K.J. Pali**'s contribution, '**The Legacy of White Imperialist Forces in the Leadership of the DRCA FS'**, opens the volume, explaining that the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in the Free State (DRCA FS, for Black Africans) is a product of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC, for the Afrikaners) mission and one of the DRC family of churches established in South Africa in 1910 for African Christians. Pali uses internalised oppression theory to analyse how the legacy of white imperialist forces influenced the leadership of the DRCA FS over the years, and continues to do so today. For many years, the DRCA FS was under the dominant leadership of white missionaries and dependent on the financial support of the DRC in the Free State. The DRCA FS members, as part of the South African community, were adversely affected by white imperialist forces of oppression, including slavery, colonialism and apartheid, in addition to the DRC's mission policy during the apartheid era. At present, the leadership of the DRCA FS faces the challenge of responding appropriately to this legacy as well as confronting dependency, division, violence and declining mission [declining mission: it is in numbers, influence, more precision needed]. Pali argues that the failure of the DRCA FS leadership to

fully acknowledge the historical context of the above problems makes it difficult to effectively address them and prepare for a better future.

**Gyaviira Kisitu and Margaret Ssebunya**, in the second chapter titled '**Governance and Egalitarianism in Africa: Exploring a Leadership Battle between the Young and Old Political Leaders'**, zero in on the fact that, despite decades of independence, many African countries still wrestle with the consequences of poor service delivery as well as the unconstitutional hold onto power by some political leaders, leading to serious differences between 'old' or elderly, vs. 'young' leaders across the entire continent. Most of the challenges that arise from this disregard of the law have been pinned on the flaws of the older generation of political leaders, often by a new wave of young political leaders. The latter, advertising themselves as a brand of alternative leaders, have been clamouring for entry into the political landscape. This demand has met the resistance of incumbents, most of whom belong to the older generation. The dynamics that emerged have played a role in creating a generational conflict among political leaders. The political battlefield, mired in its power games, has not been able to respond to humanitarian concerns. Drawing from selected cases in African countries, the chapter argues that competition for political leadership between the young and old generations, and the grip on power of the latter constitute a critical problem that hampers the realization of democracy, service delivery and peace on the continent. While 'religion' is not foregrounded in this chapter, Kisitu and Ssebunya do articulate a more constructive leadership model for the continent that is based on African values of communitarianism, service, accountability, relationship-building, connectedness and participation, which are (implicitly at least) drawn from African cultural and religious traditions that predate and transcend colonialism.

**Sunday Paul Chinazo Onwuegbuchulam**, in **'A Capability Approach Assessment of FBOs' Role and Strategies in Poverty Alleviation and Human Development in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa'**, describes how post-apartheid governments in South Africa have tried to curb poverty and underdevelopment in the country, with some successes but also many failures. In the KwaZulu-Natal Province, poverty, inequality, unemployment and decrepit social services systems constitute the main challenges that the government has to tackle. But when state agents fall short in delivering poverty alleviation and development interventions, there is evidence that

non-state actors like faith-based organizations (FBOs) have assumed the position of providing the necessary public goods to society. The role that FBOs play in liberal democracies, including to what degree their contributions to poverty alleviation and human development are paternalistic or constructive, have taken centre stage in scholarly discussions on the politics of the state. Against this backdrop, Onwuegbuchulam adopts Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to evaluate the impact of one Christian and one Muslim organization in specific communities. He finds that, despite challenges and some paternalistic tendencies, each uses constructive strategies for poverty alleviation and human development in the KwaZulu-Natal Province that go beyond conventional explanations of economic 'progress'.

In '**Top-Down Advocacy as an Antithesis of Emancipatory Politics: A Brief Review of the Politics of Abahlali baseMjondolo'**, **Stephen Phiri** and **Emmanuel Matambo** provide a much different and more critical view of humanitarian attempts at poverty alleviation. Phiri and Matambo show how top-down social and political advocacy becomes a vehicle used or encouraged by the powerful to unwittingly depoliticize any effort by the poor to emancipate themselves. Thus, established advocacy outside the locale of those it seeks to emancipate, becomes 'an erroneous' helping hand, which keeps the poor in their 'place' while the *status quo* remains untouched. In unmasking the *hypocrisy* of 'advocacy generosity', this chapter looks at the thinking and politics of the shack-dwellers' movement, Abahlali base-Mjondolo, around Durban, South Africa. It fundamentally questions the nature of help that is essentially related to advocacy on behalf of marginalized societies. Advocacy 'on behalf of' the poor, which prevents them from acting as the driving force behind the process of emancipation, becomes the *opium of the poor*. This Chapter therefore argues that an emancipatory perspective does not spare non-state actors and agencies from critique, including individuals as well as faith-based organisations. Such individuals and organizations may seem 'innocent', but their advocacy in fact works to support the established order and occludes agency on the part of the poor.

**Lukong Stella Shulika**, in her chapter, **'Women's Agency for Peace in Conflict Times: Case study of women's organisations in Liberia'**, discusses the fact that in conflict situations, women bear the brunt of their devastating effects. As such, the recognition and advancement of gender-inclusive conflict

intervention and peacebuilding have become a norm, grounded in the notion that women are vital contributors to and stakeholders in peace processes. Focusing on the lived experiences of women's organisations in Liberia (using focus-group discussions and interview information gathered from women's organisations in Liberia in July 2015), Shulika also engages Maxine Molyneux's organisational theory to provide a qualitative appraisal of women's role as agents and architects of peace. The chapter also implicitly shows that acting *as women* was more significant in compelling the government and rebels to make peace than acting as religious humanitarians. Still, it was important that women also organised across religious lines, bringing (generally male) religious leaders along with them. The chapter argues that collective agency by women's organisations creates the necessary environment for women's empowerment and a platform that allows them to contribute to peacebuilding.

**Gyaviira Kisitu, in**'**The 'Haunting Shadow' of the 2014 Anti-Homosexuality Law in Uganda'**, argues that, although attempts to [re]criminalize homosexuality in Uganda in 2014 failed, the effects and influence of this attempt linger on. The Constitutional Court ruling against the 2014 anti-homosexual law (2014 AHL) was made on technical grounds rather than on its substance. Therefore, the perception of the defeat of anti-homosexuality activism is misleading. Such a ruling also keeps the possibility of [re]criminalization open, abetted by religious (primarily Christian) leaders. This is despite the fact that biblical passages can be interpreted differently: some use the bible to condemn homosexuality and LGBTIQA+[2]; others use it to challenge such condemnations. The overall result is that social, political and religious factors that influenced the 2014 AHL remain contextually unchallenged and continue to shape public rhetoric on same sex practices and how the general public relates to LGBTIQA+ communities. Violence, discrimination, evictions, and arbitrary arrests of LGBTIQA+ people are not confined to the past, but continue to prevail in the present. As a counter response, LGBTIQA+ communities have resorted to creating safe[r] spaces. These sanctuaries, nevertheless, seem to attract more hostile surveillance. This chapter, then, argues that the court

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[2] In this article, LGBTIQA+ is used in reference to the communities of people or individuals identifying themselves as lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, intersexual, queer, asexual, and other identities not mentioned, who do not consider themselves heterosexuals.

ruling on the 2014 AHL had little impact on the public perception of same sex in Uganda. As a consequence, surveillance over homosexuality and LGBTIQA+ communities, abetted by certain religious actors and claims, continues in the aftermath of the ruling in an attempt to silence gender and sexual minorities in the country.

**R. Simangaliso Kumalo** argues that the role of religion in the governance of society appears ambiguous and complicated. In view of this complexity, it should never be ignored but instead studied and analysed carefully, so that what is good from it, can be gleaned for the benefit of good governance, and what is bad, can be discarded. In '**Royalty, Religion and Residency: The Swati Experience of Governance with Special Reference to the Period 1968 – 2018'** Kumalo looks at Eswatini, where, on the one hand, African Traditional Religion and African Instituted Christianity are seen largely as responsible for the theological justification and support for the absolute monarchy. On the other hand, progressive mainline denominations and evangelicals have been seen as responsible for the call to change the system to participatory democracy. Religion is therefore both a key pillar that instituted and supports the absolute monarchy, and a catalyst for change, resistance and inspiration for people seeking to contribute to the development of democracy and good governance. In examining the relationship between religion and the monarchy, however, the chapter also seeks to determine the relationship between religion and the ordinary citizenry of the country. In critically analysing the political significance of religion for both the royal family, which effectively constitutes the ruling class, and residents, which comprise ordinary citizens, Kumalo disentangles its complexity. In particular, he argues that, while on the one hand religion provides theological justification and affirmation for the dominance of the royal family in the governing of the country, on the other it relegates citizens to the margins, as subjects. Even so, religion can still be used as a catalyst to encourage the residents to stand up and transform the political system to one that is democratic and participatory for the benefit of all citizens.

**Cecelia Lynch, in 'Interrogating the Place of African Religions in Humanitarian Governance'**, argues that religious humanitarian governance through faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Africa has historically side-lined and condemned African religions, with ongoing echoes of that side-lining in religious, as well as secular forms of humanitarian governance today. Lynch

draws on the development of humanitarian ethics in the midst of the spread of other 'world religions' such as Christianity and Islam, across the continent, also highlighting several debates about religious humanitarian governance that arose in two conferences sponsored by the Critical Investigations into Humanitarianism in Africa (CIHA) Blog. She argues in favour of recapturing the fullness of the African religious landscape in humanitarian governance as well as within all religious traditions with roots on the continent. It is important however, she cautions, that such inclusion of African religions on the part of transnational humanitarian actors, avoid both the romanticization of these religions and their institutional appropriation.

In sum, the contributions in this volume address numerous significant intersections between religious traditions, religious leaders, and forms of power in humanitarian, state, and transnational forms of governance. At the same time, they gesture towards the necessity for intersectional analysis of gender, sexuality and class along with religion. While always present in one form or another, religious factors sometimes have primary and sometimes secondary roles in governance. We hope that this publication will continue to inspire dialogue and debate by scholars of governance, and especially theologians who are engaged in governance studies. The topics are not only relevant with regard to perspectives on the past, but also with regard to constructive engagement on the present and future development of governance systems in Africa.

## References

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*Governance and Egalitarianism in Africa*

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