Development as a Form of Religious Engineering?

Religion and Secularity in Development Discourse

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The point is: when we realise that development is some kind of a substitute for the progressive, linear (and liberal) concept of history, we simply *must* become suspicious! In particular, when we reckon with the well-known interpretation that this concept is ultimately a secularised version of a Judeo-Christian idea – that the course of history is continuously moving forward to salvation. (Harskamp, 2004, p. 2)

Religion and development have more of a common history than is often recognized, especially in the relatively new and burgeoning field studying their interrelation. Here, the recent “turn to religion” in development practice and development studies is sometimes presented as something of a new discovery, with a number of scholars tending to portray development as an originally secular concern, which only recently has begun to open up to the potency and sensibilities of religions (e.g. Clarke, 2013b; Deneulin, 2009; Korff and Schrader, 2004; Haynes, 2007).

This narrative is certainly useful to highlight (if not to prepare) the recently rising development studies interest in religions, but it comes with two main problems that can lead to a fundamental misunderstanding of the interrelation between religions and development. Firstly, the often corollary tendency to begin international development with Truman’s second inaugural in 1949 (Point Four Speech) eclipses the much longer history of colonial regimes of development in their relation to Christian missions and notions of religious progress. While the post-War development project departs from these earlier colonial notions in some ways, it also inherited its humanitarian, and ultimately Christian, rhetoric of global progress, alongside the structural resources of the established Christian missions. Secondly, the emphasis on the “secularity” of the post-Second World

War development project may occlude the fact that the “secular” is always part of the discourse on “religion”. As sociologists proposed and fleshed out various secularization theories, they contributed to a much older debate about the role of religions in the functioning of societies and political regimes. Development studies, as will be shown below, borrowed from this debate about religion, and inherited some of its same problems, most importantly the mismatch between sociological rhetoric of the rising irrelevance of religion in the “modern” world and lived reality outside of Europe. From this vantage point, the recent “rediscovery” of religion as a significant social force is more of a reckoning with the limits of the secularization paradigm in much of the world and in contemporary politics.

The point of these observations of course is not to argue that development is essentially a religious exercise, or even that religion has some sort of “natural” importance for the practice and study of development. Rather, this article aims to show that historically, the discourses of religion and development have been interwoven, from the colonial civilizing mission and the post-Second World War American development ideal, to the emergence of secular progress ideology in the 1960s and finally the recent focus on faith-based actors. The latest turn toward the interrelation of religion and development therefore is not a “rediscovery” but the continuation of a longer story of European and North American institutions casting their vision of progress upon the world.

This line of questioning and critique is not entirely new. Recent publications on religion and development have occasionally pointed to its longer colonial history (ter Haar, 2011; Tomalin, 2013; Deacon and Tomalin, 2015), though important details remain to be spelled out. While earlier studies on the ideological roots of development tended to ignore religion (Cowne and Shenton, 1996; Preston, 1996), younger publications on humanitarianism and development have highlighted the role of Christianity in shaping concepts of development during colonialism and after (Barnett, 2011; Paulmann, 2013; Rist, 2014). Taking these works as a point of departure, this article will lay out a more specific history of the connection between the “development of religion” and the “religion of development” (Salemink, van Haarskamp and Giri, 2004), tracing its development in

concrete examples.

While much earlier starting points could have been chosen, the analysis will begin with the nineteenth century anti-slavery movement and the modes of colonial intervention they produced. The changing visions of progress during colonialism and the role of religion therein will be explored next, before the alleged secularism of post-Second World War development is explored and finally the politics behind the recent “return of religion.” Within the context of this special issue, an underlying question for the treatise as a whole will be whether this longer history of development can be understood as a case of “religious engineering.” This question will be addressed in the conclusion, which seeks to qualify the concept in relation to the discussion of religion and development. On occasion, the analysis will draw on examples from Africa, which arguably has been one of the foremost arenas for development debates since the colonial era. For India a similar story could be told (Haustein and Tomalin, 2017), but this as well as many other regions of the world remain outside the scope of this article.

Frontiers of Development: Anti-Slavery Activism and the ‘Civilising Mission’

A useful entry point for examining the interrelated history of debates about religion and development is the anti-slavery movement and its importance for the European push toward the African interior. The British antislavery movement had celebrated its first significant success in the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. While this was a remarkable achievement of this ‘curious alliance of Enlightenment humanism and evangelical outrage’ (Reid, 2012, p. 28), it had been made possible if not politically advantageous for Britain by the geopolitical context of the time, most importantly the loss of the American colonies and the Napoleonic Wars (Drescher, 2009, pp. 205–241; Swaminathan, 2009, pp. 92–96, 214–5). Following the Slave Trade Act, Britain succeeded in forcing other countries to adopt similar policies, most notably the USA, which ended the import of slaves from January 1808. These measures only had a limited impact on the transatlantic slave trade, however, which now continued via Cuba and under French, Spanish and Portuguese flags,

while the USA mainly relied on its internal slave market and the birth of slave children (Eltis, 1987). In this environment, the Royal Navy's efforts to suppress directly the shipment of slaves across the Atlantic had little effect on the overall numbers, but at the same time the British presence served to underscore and reinforce the Empire's growing power over the West African coast and its trade infrastructure, while asserting its moral authority over the anti-slavery cause.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, the Royal Navy's expeditions produced an influx of recaptives in Sierra Leone which not only fundamentally changed the character of this "freedman" colony, but showed that the British liberation of enslaved Africans was 'simultaneously an act of emancipation and of colonization' (Anderson, 2013).

It was in this context that the antislavery movement joined forces with colonization advocates, forming unusual alliances and beginning to drum for an entirely different project – the "civilizing" and development of Africa. The manifesto for this project was Thomas Fowell Buxton's *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy* (1840). Buxton was a Quaker, member of parliament, co-founder of the Anti-Slavery Society, and a leading voice of the second generation of antislavery activists. Most importantly, he combined Christian and humanitarian rhetoric with global and local economic analysis, providing a blueprint for many subsequent calls to "develop" Africa. Buxton argued that even in the unlikely event that all nations would join forces to suppress the slave trade, this would still not suffice to end the practice due to the enormous profit margins the trade provided (1840, pp. 218–255). Instead an alternative economy needed to be established in Africa for "improving her own state," while "adding to the enjoyments and stimulating the commerce of the civilised world" (Buxton, 1840, p. 272). With the proper stimulus, this was entirely achievable, because Africa possessed "vast, though as yet undeveloped, resources", which could be exploited instead of the slave trade if "her population was sufficiently enlightened" (Buxton, 1840, pp. 301–302). At the same time new markets could be opened up for European goods through African consumption, which in turn would be achieved by a threefold program in Africa: "to encourage her commerce; to improve the cultivation of her soil; and to raise the morals, and the minds of her

inhabitants” (Buxton, 1840, p. 310). The parallels of Buxton’s thoughts with twentieth century development philosophy are obvious: in the absence of a political will to eradicate a global system of exploitation, energy is focused on the hope that the system can be bypassed and perhaps defeated by installing a different economy among those most affected by its destructive consequences.

For implementing this new economy, Buxton foresaw the necessity of a wide alliance of “the merchant, the philanthropist, the patriot, and the Christian” (Buxton, 1840, p. 306), and indeed, Buxton’s own reliance on the slavery advocate James McQueen for advocating the Niger expedition pays testimony to this broad colonial platform (Lambert, 2013, pp. 176–206). Christianity was instrumental in this development alliance:

Let missionaries and schoolmasters, the plough and the spade, go together, and agriculture will flourish; the avenues to legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will be inspired; whilst civilization will advance as the natural effect, and

Christianity operate as the proximate cause of this happy change. (Buxton, 1840, p. 511)

Alongside the preparation of his book, Buxton founded the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa (1839), whose first aim it was to fund and organize the Niger Expedition of 1841. The Society’s aims read like a modern development program: enable literacy (by introducing scripts for local languages), provide medical education to prevent diseases, improve agricultural methods, and end human trafficking (Buxton, 1840, pp. 7–10; cf. Táíwò, 2010, p. 64). While the Niger Expedition was a spectacular fail, it was a culmination point of the longer history of the slogan of “commerce and Christianity,” which would become a guiding phrase for the interplay of missionary and colonial ventures throughout the nineteenth century, wrapped in a providentialist theology about the God-given British mission to the world (Stanley, 1983; Porter, 1985; Follett, 2008).

Arguably the most important figure for popularizing the concept of “commerce and Christianity” was David Livingstone, who echoed Buxton’s call in the 1850s and 1860s. By now, attention had

begun to shift to Central and East Africa, where the Arab slave trade provided the backdrop against which new missionary initiatives were established. Alongside Livingstone's career from a dissenter evangelical missionary of the London Missionary Society to the famous explorer, the evangelical anti-slavery and development activism morphed into a mainstream cause. Livingstone's speech in Cambridge in 1857 turned into the foundational myth of the Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA), which now adopted his pathfinder mission for "commerce and Christianity" as legacy bequeathed to the Anglican establishment (Anderson-Morsehead, 1909, p. 4). The UMCA echoed Buxton's earlier efforts in two respects. Firstly, its initial resolutions offered a similar mix of Christianity, development and systemic aspirations in declaring that its mission stations were tasked with the "promotion of the spread of true religion, agriculture, and lawful commerce, and the ultimate extirpation of the slave-trade" (Anderson-Morsehead, 1909, p. 415). Secondly, like Buxton's Niger Mission, the UMCA's first inland expedition of 1861 was an abortive disaster, leading the Mission to relocate its efforts to Zanzibar until another, more successful inland attempt was made in the context of the Scramble for Africa over twenty years later.

While these grand development schemes of abolishing the slave trade by establishing new economic ties to the interior could not be realized in the predominant mid-19th century mode of African exploration, the fight against the slave trade remained a central issue and became an important catalyst for the formal colonization of Africa in the "Scramble" of the late 1880s. There were two main reasons for this.

Firstly, as missionaries settled for smaller projects around the liberation of slaves, the scheme of commerce and Christianity was replaced by the rhetoric of the "Christian civilizing mission." The work of the Spiritan Fathers in East Africa is a perfect example for this dynamic. When their work began in Zanzibar from 1863 onward, they quickly established a population of dependents by ransoming children on the slave market (Kollman, 2005, p. 96). The strategic consideration behind this was that children might be formed into Christians far easier than adults, and that thus a nucleus of an African church would be established for the evangelization of the interior. By 1868, the

Spiritans established an agricultural colony just outside Bagamoyo, an important caravan terminus on the East African coast, because they believed that the rhythm of agricultural work and spiritual exercises would benefit their proteges and “carries them naturally to Christian civilization” (Horner, quoted by Kollman, 2005, p. 145). Bagamoyo became a sizable plantation and Christian model village, and its focus on labor and labor education received high praise by the well-known explorer and foremost colonial propagandist of the time, Henry Morton Stanley (Kollman, 2005, pp. 141–2). Stanley profiled this in contrast to the Anglican UMCA efforts, which in his estimation failed to “develop the qualities” of the “practical human being.” His German counterpart, Hermann von Wissmann, would later articulate the same sentiment with reference to the work of the White Fathers in Tabora, who worked in a similar regime (Wissmann, 1888, p. 269). For both colonial advocates, these labor regimes fit with their racist perception of African “laziness” and their colonial schemes of turning subsistence economies into profitable labor markets. The Christian “civilizing mission” thus became the development scheme of the colonial push for Africa.

The second reason for the continued relevance of Christian anti-slave trade activism for the emerging colonial “development” of Africa was geopolitics. In East and Central Africa there already existed a main economic and political rival in the Omani/Swahili caravan trade of slaves and ivory. At first, England and Germany, the two main European powers in the East, were not interested in the continental slave economy,ⁱⁱⁱ but anti-slavery causes soon proved useful for mobilizing for conquest, especially on the German side. By 1888 the slave-trading “Arabs” were characterized in the colonial press and political discourse as the main geopolitical foe to European “civilizing” in Africa. Moreover, in order to help secure parliamentary support for military action against the coastal uprising the German East Africa Company encountered, the former missionary and colonial advocate Friedrich Fabri engineered an anti-slavery platform for mobilizing the German public, which united missionary constituents, colonial advocates, industrialists and military personnel alike (Bade, 1977; Haustein, 2017). The German conquest war was thus reframed as a geopolitical necessity for development in collaboration with Christian anti-slavery and anti-Muslim

activism. Wissmann, who would shortly be tasked with leading the German military conquest of the East African coast, heaped praise on Cardinal Lavigerie's call for a Christian "crusade" against Arabs in inner Africa and mused that it was his dearest wish to "see freed the enslaved race ... and to truly open Africa to the influence of our civilization." (*Deutsche Kolonialzeitung*, 1888, p. 355)

Religion and Colonial Development Policy

With the post-"Scramble" establishment of colonial governance in the early 1890s, the platform of "commerce and Christianity" was gradually replaced by a complex field of diverging interests between colonial governments, missionaries, settlers, and other economic interest groups (Porter, 2002). Depending on local circumstances, this led to cooperation, competition, or conflict, and the ideological configuration of religious and developmental aims in the "civilizing mission" became more fluid. It is impossible to give a useful global account of these colonial dynamics in the confines of this article, especially when one considers the considerable differences in the colonial engagement with different regional contexts (Haustein and Tomalin, 2017). Instead, three main features of the colonial debate will be identified here via the example of German East Africa, in order to show in sufficient detail that colonialism provides certain antecedents for current discussions of religion and development. While German colonial debates certainly did not have the same paradigmatic impact as the French idea of "mise en valeur" or the British concept of the "dual mandate" (Rist, 2014, pp. 52, 62), the existence of similar debates in this fairly minor colonial power shows that the making of modern development ideas was rooted in wider ideological concepts of Europe's mission to the world.

The first feature that emerges when studying the German "civilizing" discourse in East Africa was the foregrounding of developmental aims over religious or humanitarian concerns. Almost immediately with the mobilization for conquest, Friedrich Fabri began to dismantle his anti-slave trade platform and called for bold infrastructure investments (Fabri, 1889, pp. 53–57). The colonial press followed suit, and pivoted from its earlier calls to "oust Arabs" to questions of integrating Islam and harnessing its potential for "civilizing" Africans (Haustein, 2017, p. 503). While slave-

hunting and the large scale slave trade were suppressed quickly, slavery itself was never abolished during German rule and only subsided gradually for mostly economic reasons (Deutsch, 2004). In the political debate, slavery was reframed as an African version of “serfdom” and an institution providing social benefits, which could only be abolished in a long-term cultural process of economic restructuring and cultural “civilizing.” This political pivot toward retaining slavery can only partially be explained by the fear of causing unrest, because the more fundamental cause was what the Germans called the “labor issue”: the persistent shortage of a wage labor force for the production of cash crops and thereby colonial surpluses. In what was largely a subsistence economy, plantation and domestic labor was traditionally provided by slaves, and the Germans sought to change this system on two fronts. On the one hand, various economic and legal measures were introduced for generating a cash economy and incentivizing monetary profits, most importantly taxation, external labor recruitment, infrastructure, and contract regulation (Iliffe, 1969, 1979, pp. 123–167). On the other hand, the Germans relied on coercive measures or what they called “labor education”: the brutal treatment of “lazy” workers, community labor regimes, and the criminal punishment of “breaking of contract” (Koponen, 1994, pp. 321–440; Deutsch, 2004, pp. 118–27; Haustein, 2017). This “development for exploitation” (Koponen, 1994) became the guiding framework of colonial rule in East Africa and beyond. It superseded any humanitarian or religious causes while being itself framed in the language of economic progress and the ultimate “emancipation” of the population subjected to this process (Rist, 2014, p. 58).

Consequently – and this is the second feature of colonial religion and development – religious actors and sentiments were measured against their contribution to this economic development. In German East Africa this became apparent right away when just after his conquest war Wissmann, a Prussian Protestant, praised the Catholic missionary “*labora et ora*” culture over the “intellectualist” conversion attempts by Protestants. In what became an unusually public dispute between a German official and Protestant missionaries, Wissmann contended that Africans were incapable of understanding the “religion of love,” and that the “outwardness” of the Catholic “cult” was the only

way to “raise the savage to a higher form of being” (Wissmann, 1890). Other colonial activists contended that the “pragmatism” and “fatalism” of Islam would be far more suitable to colonial development. Missionaries reacted by arguing that sustainable “civilizing” was only achieved on the basis of Christianity and its ethics, but this argument became a recurring source of debate throughout German colonial rule, especially when missionaries attacked perceived “Islam-friendly” colonial policies. As late as 1915 some of their opponents argued that a “compromise between the Islamitic and Christian world view” would be necessary to provide the right measure of compulsion in the “labor issue” (see Haustein, 2018). These tensions between the missionary and settler projects of colonial development were also part of British rule in East Africa (Lonsdale, 2002) and colonial contexts beyond (Porter, 2002, 2006).

Thirdly, despite these differences about the aims and process of “civilizing,” the practical contributions made by missionaries were crucial to the colonial development project. Missionaries remained crucial in mobilizing the German public behind the “civilizing” cause through their adult and juvenile magazines and grass-roots activism. Even more important were the services of missionaries “on the ground,” despite recurring policy disagreements. Missionaries in German East Africa provided valuable trade and information links to rural contexts, subsidized for colonial governments in legal disputes and administration, and accrued knowledge about languages and cultures. More importantly, they offered critical medical and educational services. Even though the government had installed a much contested secular school system for training children of Muslim notables, the missionary pupils outnumbered those of the government by twenty to one (Schlunk, 1914, pp. 139–140) and both sides recognized the need for collaboration (Becher, 1996). In British tropical Africa the numbers were similar, as ninety-six percent of pupils were attending a mission school at the end of the Second World War (Hastings, 1994, p. 542). In their manifold provisions, missions compensated for the failures of the colonial economy in rapidly transitioning contexts, arguably a structural position occupied by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) today (Manji and O’Coill, 2002). It should be noted that in German East Africa, these contributions were not

limited to Christian missionaries. The Khoja community played an important role in endowments by the wealthy merchant Sewa Haji (Ndunguru, Kadelya and Henschel, no date; Matson, 1966) and in a German recruitment scheme of Indian settlers for which the government courted the Aga Khan. These three observations from German East Africa and beyond show that colonial development and “civilizing” was one of the channels through which colonial societies debated the relevance and place of religion in the world. Unlike in the earlier humanitarian rhetoric of the anti-slavery movement, colonial development was articulated primarily in economic, political, and anthropological universals, but precisely this tendency defined an arena of debate for religious actors. As they played an important, if subsidiary, role in stabilizing colonial economies and polities, missionaries joined in the discussion of ethical and ideological principles of colonialism while being judged themselves with regard to their contribution to colonial development. This colonial arena for debating the relevance of religion in the formation of colonial societies was of course not limited to missionary activism. The emerging comparative study of religions coincided with Europe’s “civilizing” of the world and revolved around similar questions about the role of religions for societal “civility” and progress (Chidester, 2014).^{iv}

Decolonization and “Underdeveloped” States: The Foundational Role of Religion in the “Secular” Development Project

After the Second World War, it quickly became apparent that the old colonial model was going to be replaced by a new configuration of the global economy and international relations. The north-south contrast between colonizers and colonized began to pale against the east-west divide of competing political systems, and the resulting geopolitics necessitated different patron-client relations with the former colonies. The erstwhile “civilization deficits” of colonies were now recast as “underdevelopment” as the Gross Domestic Product became the main measure of inequality among *de jure* equal states. (Rist, 2014, pp. 73–76)

For the West, Truman’s Marshall Plan of 1948 and his global development program, announced in his second inaugural of 1949, became the hallmarks of a new economic and military

interventionism in the name of human progress, framed in a modernist language of prosperity and based on scientific and economic rationality. This does not mean, however, that this was an entirely new program of humanitarianism, nor that religion and development now were “emphatically separate concerns” (Haynes, 2007, p. 1). Alongside the ideological and structural heritage of colonial “civilizing”, this new development project inherited the important role of religion, which was only gradually transformed in the next decades alongside emerging secularization theories.

Truman’s aforementioned inaugural address is itself a case in point. After spelling out – in the modernist language of scientific progress – his “bold new program [...] for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas,” Truman turned to religious rhetoric in order to drive his point home. He now quoted the Biblical Sermon on the Mount (“Our allies are the millions who hunger and thirst after righteousness”), which was one of the two Biblical texts he had rested his hand on when taking the oath of office just moments before. He closed with these words:

Steadfast in our faith in the Almighty, we will advance toward a world where man's freedom is secure. To that end we will devote our strength, our resources, and our firmness of resolve. With God's help, the future of mankind will be assured in a world of justice, harmony, and peace. (Truman, 1949)

These religious professions for the sake of humanitarian intervention portray a certain continuity of the post-Second World War development project with its nineteenth century forebears. This is not to argue for simple ideological parallels between Truman and Victorian humanitarianism. Instead, Truman’s inaugural remarks adhered first and foremost to the form of US presidential speeches and their American “Civil Religion” (Bellah, 1970). Yet it nevertheless shows that the mobilizing rhetoric for Truman’s Point Four Program did not simply rest in a vision of scientific progress, but was framed and fortified by Christian ideals of social justice, providentialism, and (post-millennial) eschatology. The “civil religion” of this new development did not do away with God but placed him inside a universalizing ethic, and the aspirational rhetoric of American exceptionalism.

The emerging theory of economic development also did not simply push aside religion. The Princeton economist and Nobel laureate W. Arthur Lewis, is an important example for this, because he was not only the “acknowledged pioneer” of development economics (Tignor, 2006, p. 79), but also an influential voice in the shaping of development policy in the British Colonial Office, the UN, Ghana, and the Caribbean. In his *Theory of Economic Growth* (1955), Lewis began with the assumption that underneath three proximate causes for growth (the will to economize, increasing knowledge increase, and capital accumulation), there were basic contextual factors that would influence their operations (Lewis, 1955, p. 11). These were primarily institutions, beliefs, and the natural environment. He saw religion as highly relevant to both institutions and beliefs. In a later section specifically on religion (Lewis, 1955, pp. 101–107), where he discussed the stimulating and stymieing impact religious beliefs and authorities had on economic growth, he importantly rejected the view that religious sentiments merely followed economic factors. Rather, religion appears as a fundamental factor to economic development:

After all, social change results mainly from what people do, and this in turn is mainly the result of what they believe. Religion permeates our beliefs because religious instruction (whether formal or informal) begins while we are still on our mother’s knees. What we learn late in life for ourselves we can often unlearn by argument or demonstration, but what we have absorbed in childhood is much harder to cast out (Lewis, 1955, p. 106).

Despite this importance Lewis attributed to religion, for him it was merely a social factor determining the possibility of economic development, and unlike Truman’s rhetoric or the proclamations of anti-slavery activists, religion was not an ethical motivator for economic development. Instead, Lewis defended desirability and possibility of growing economies on more or less purely economic grounds and defended himself against accusations of agnostic rationalism (Lewis, 1955, pp. 420–435, esp. 427). In this sense, his economic development theory can be considered secular, but as shown above, such a prioritization of economic development over religious aspirations and the measuring of religious actors against this goal was not a new post-

Second World War position, but had already been an essential feature of colonial policy debates.

Another colonial continuity of the global development project lay in the charitable monopoly Christian missions retained in social care, education, and poverty alleviation. The foreseeable impact of national independence on the African “mission fields” led to various tactical responses in what Ogbu Kalu (2003) interpreted as a “passive revolution”. One strategy for retaining influence – alongside “waltzing with nationalists” and making greater efforts in adapting Christianity to African culture – was the employment of indigenous personnel in the various missionary institutions, still funded and led from abroad. A new language of “partnership” and “participation” enabled the continued channeling of development interventions while cementing the continued flow of resources and programs from the “first” to the “third” world. The “moratorium debate” of the early 1970s, emerging from the proposition of a funding moratorium by some “partner churches”, highlighted the problem of African dependence on missionary church and development funds. Yet ultimately, this quite extensive debate failed to change the missionary funding structures, because the theological argument of the unity of the global church won the upper hand over concerns of development dependence (Sundkler and Steed, 2000, pp. 1027–9). Even in countries like Ethiopia, where a Marxist state appropriated the churches’ development assets, the missionary impact proved to be remarkably resilient in the long run. Despite significant disruptions, churches and other Christian development organizations remained an important channel of development aid, to the point of these efforts providing a political foothold for their continued religious efforts under an anti-religious regime (Haustein, 2009; Freeman, 2013). Overall, capacity building and other development efforts were significant in prolonging missionary presence in all of Africa, with an estimated 30–40,000 Western missionaries still working in the continent by 1995 (Isichei, 1995, p. 327).

Beyond these missionary continuities, the interrelation of religion and development retained its significance throughout the global South. Latin American Liberation Theology (Gutiérrez, 1974) became a major amplifier of the anti-modernist Dependency Theory of development as well as a

pioneer in communal activism, and its political-theological program of holistic development was adapted in different contexts, such as Korean Minjung Theology, Indian Dalit Theology, Black Theology, and South African anti-Apartheid Theology. Religions other than Christianity were equally unaffected by the alleged secularism of the post-War development project, drawing on and debating their own theological and institutional heritage in social engagement. In the case of Africa, Islamic reform movements provide a useful example for the continued political and social proximity of religion and development. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and its sister organizations elsewhere conducted relief and development activities in close proximity to their religious and political aims. Saudi Arabia brought African students to Saudi Arabian universities and funded schools in various African countries, which helped to strengthen the religious hegemony of Wahābism over Muslim Reformist thought in Africa, in a process that already began in the 1920s (Lauzière, 2010). And even the socialist autocrats of African Muslim countries, like Mu‘ammar al-Qaḍḍāfī in Libya, Ja‘far al-Numayrī in the Sudan, and Siad Barre in Somalia, regularly invoked Islamic principles for justifying not just political but also developmental aims, such as greater gender equality or economic progress. While some engaged international development rhetoric, there is little evidence that this guided or even majorly influenced their local politics of articulating an Islamic version of progress.

Against this background of a continued if not rising relevance of religion for development ideology and practice throughout the twentieth century, the progressing marginalization of religion in Western development thought and practice appears in stark contrast. This emerging secularism of development hardly emerged from the engagement with recipient countries, but must be read as a consequence of sociological secularization theories. A useful and frequently cited example of this new secularism of development is Rostow’s influential *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960). His high-modernist, universal theory of economic development took relatively little note of religion and downplayed Weber’s idea of religion influencing the transformation of economic systems (cf. Deneulin, 2009, p. 36).

However, in two respects, religion continued to frame even Rostow's argument. First, when explaining why his model of liberal development would be preferable to the historical determinism and ruthless utilitarianism of Marxism, he suddenly fell back on Christianity as a fundamental expression of democratic values and a sustainable social system (Rostow, 1960, p. 165). Quoting his MIT colleague, the military historian Elting E. Morison, Rostow contrasted the (allegedly socialist) evil of putting a defined utopian above the means with the allegedly foundational Christian ethics of democracy:

For our civilization, we have agreed it was most memorably stated in the New Testament—with its intense concern for the relationship of a man to himself and the next man to him, with its distrust of logical systems and uniform solutions, its parables radiating off their ambiguous meanings, its biting conflicting admonitions, and its insistence that wisdom is only wise if, as situations change, what is wise also changes. Such a view of things appears to have been in the minds of those who invented democracy [...] (Morison as quoted by Rostow, 1960, p. 165)

Secondly, religion was also featured in Rostow's speculative outlook beyond the fifth and final stage of development, the age of mass consumerism. Here, Rostow mused whether humanity would be able to overcome the ensuing "spiritual stagnation" or "spiritual boredom," which was a fairly striking admission of the limits of economizing development (Rostow, 1960, p. 92). Therefore, even for Rostow, a main scholarly reference for cold-war development theory, religion is not entirely absent, but appears as bookends in the history of societal development. Not unlike Buxton or Truman before him, religion remained the primal reference point for value system of the Western development economy as well as its eschatological horizon.

The point of these observations is not to argue that religion had an invariable presence in twentieth century development thought, or that the latter was not "really secular." Instead, the argument is that Rostow's remarks help elucidate the place (and continued role) of religion in secularization theories. Rostow's evolutionary system of stages of development fundamentally rested on Talcott Parsons'

modernization theory (Gilman, 2007, p. 163). Parsons, in turn, was the foremost translator and interpreter of Weber in American sociology, but he deviated from Weber in two respects, which is important for Rostow's understanding of development and religion. First, Parsons took a more optimistic view of modern capitalism than Weber had and thus provided a vision which was "perfectly suited [...] for development crusaders trying to sell the American version of modernity to postcolonial regions" (Gilman, 2007, p. 93). Second, Parsons interpretation overemphasized the role of the normative for Weber's sociology, including religion (Cohen, Hazelrigg and Pope, 1975). This was due to Parsons' own sociology which ascribed central integrating and legitimating functions to religion. These functions, according to Parsons, were impeded in modernization through processes of differentiation and pluralization. As a result, religion retreated from the public sphere through privatization, leaving behind a moral community built around value-generalization (Parsons, 1966). This process of privatization and value generalization helps explain why Rostow resorted to religion in the ethical framing his theory of development, but otherwise ignored the input of religious actors.

The secular character of post 1960 development theory therefore does not point to a simple absence of religion or an "a-religious" character of development, but to a specific place assigned to religions in Western academic thought about modernity. Parsons' ideas formed the core of the neo-classical theories of secularization, developed in the following years by sociologists like Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, and Niklas Luhmann. They were mirrored in Christian theologies as well, most famously perhaps in Harvey Cox's *The Secular City* (1965) or the Death of God Theology of the 1960s and 70s. In all of these theories, religions retained a broad value-orientating function, but lost their dogmatic and institutional authority in an age of pluralization, differentiation, and (at least overt) state neutrality. For development actors this entailed turning a blind eye to religions. Religious beliefs and practices might (still) be central to certain target communities, but could play no role in the practice of international development cooperation.

Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) and Non-Governmental

Organisations (NGOs): The “Discovery” of Religion in Development Thought

This sociological idea of receding religion in the “modern” world was ill-equipped to assess religious developments in Africa and elsewhere. The above-mentioned Harvey Cox became a case in point when in 1995 he wrote another bestseller about the global rise of Pentecostalism, completely reversing his prior stance on rising secularism to a global renaissance of religion (Cox, 1995, p. xvi). This was in line with the emerging “revenge of God” (Kepel, 1994) theories in political science, sociology, and theology, which culminated in Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” hypothesis and the Fundamentalism Project in Chicago (Marty and Appleby, 1991; Huntington, 1997). Arguably these theories were a response to the renewed political relevance of religious rhetoric in various political events, such as the Iranian revolution or the rise of the religious right in the USA. Development studies did not yet join the conversation to a noticeable extent. Even though the development relevance of religious movements such as Pentecostalism is now well documented (Freeman, 2012), development studies first needed another nudge from the political system for such analyses to emerge.

This nudge essentially came from the neoliberal roll-back of the state and the resulting compensatory role taken on by non-state actors. In development practice, the structural adjustment programs implemented by the world bank and the IMF left ‘NGOs fill[ing] gaps left by the privatization of state services’ (Desai and Potter, 2008, p. 500; cf. Simon, 2008). US-American interior politics were of course guided by a similar philosophy of shrinking state actors and privatizing their services, which led to a new role for religious actors. The 1996 Welfare Reform Act, forced on Clinton by Congress during his re-election campaign, contained a so-called ‘Charitable Choice’ provision, which encouraged states to utilize charitable and religious organizations for delivering welfare services. This provision had been introduced by Senator John Ashcroft, a devout Pentecostal Christian, with the express purpose of encouraging the involvement of faith actors (Clarke, 2008). While the bill protected clients against religious discrimination, it also effectively eroded a stricter interpretation of the separation clause of the First Amendment,

which had hitherto prevented taxpayer funded programs from utilizing religious services. George W. Bush had made extensive use of the Charitable Choice provision as governor of Texas and quickly expanded its scope to the federal level when he became President. In only his second week in office he signed two executive orders, one creating a White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the other forming corresponding units in five other departments (Labor, Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Education, Health and Human Services) (Cnaan and Boddie, 2002). Charitable Choice and the visibility Bush granted religious groups in his government agenda were highly controversial at the time, and the political debate soon culminated in the Community Solutions Act (bill H.R. 7), which would have expanded the Charitable Choice to most social service programs (Black, Koopman and Ryden, 2004). Narrowly adopted by the House, the bill failed to clear the Senate, and the Bush White House reacted with a number of executive orders in late 2002 in order to implement some of its provisions anyway (Ackerman, 2003, pp. 35–36).

At this point, Charitable Choice and the language of “Faith-Based Organizations” spilled over into the development sector, because one of these orders created the Center for Faith Based and Community Initiatives (CFBCI) in the US Agency for International Development (USAID) with the explicit mandate to “eliminate regulatory, contracting, and other programmatic obstacles to the participation of faith-based and other community organizations” (Bush, George W., 2002; see also Stambach, 2015; Adkins, Hefferan and Occhipinti, 2010; Cooper, 2014). During his presidency, Bush almost doubled funding to “faith-based” groups, from 10.5 per cent of aid in 2001 to 19.9 per cent in 2005 (James, 2009, p. 5), with “much of this increase going to evangelical Christian organizations” (Occhipinti, 2015, p. 332; Hackworth, 2012).

The World Bank, who had begun to emphasize local factors, including religion, by the turn of the century, intensified its effort in faith dialogue at about the same time (Tomalin 2013, 214). Other countries – notably the UK, Switzerland, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden – soon followed suit and began to fund and utilize FBOs in domestic and international projects. Development scholarship

now picked up on these practices. A first set of publications was centered on the category of FBO, highlighting, on the one hand, the difficulty of defining this category and its distinction from “secular” NGOs (e.g. Clarke and Jennings, 2008) and critiquing, on the other hand, the unhelpful generalizations and unsubstantiated assertions about the advantages of FBOs over state or other private actors (e.g. Tomalin, 2012). Soon this broadened to a wider discussion of religion and development, and a new field emerged in the intersection of development studies and religious studies, with increased research funding (see esp. the DfID-funded Religions and Development Project in Birmingham, 2005–10) and the publication of special journal issues, edited volumes, and textbooks (see esp. Haynes, 2007; Deneulin, 2009; Clarke, 2013a; Tomalin, 2013, 2015; Rakodi, 2014).

This reemergence of religion as a legitimate subject in development practice and development studies enabled donors and scholars to account better for the views and institutional constraints of religious actors in their countries of interest, but it also comes with its own impositions. Firstly, the category of FBO and the funding streams it unlocks, created new and artificial separations in many African and Asian contexts, where religious actors and communities have long been closely involved with governmental and non-governmental development efforts and often functioned as gatekeepers for international NGOs (Haustein and Tomalin, 2017, pp. 87–88). This is not without ironies: whereas before, religious institutions had to accept the secularism of development aid, they are now encouraged to fund FBOs. Secondly, the reinsertion of religion into the development discourse has not generally led to an increase of religious literacy among development actors, and the impetus to evaluate the development potential of a particular religion often leads to unhelpful generalizations or essentialisms (Gifford, 2015). Finally, despite the increased tendency to utilize religious institutions for development intervention, there seems to be less sympathy toward letting religious actors influence the programming of development. The Sustainable Development Goals process involved religious organizations only very late, and the ability of religious actors to shape the implementation of sustainable development agenda depends on a variety of political factors.^v

Conclusion: Development History as Religious Engineering?

The argument of this, admittedly selective, genealogy has been that in order to fully understand the current interest in religion and development, a longer history must be told which draws out the colonial and post-colonial mutations of this theme and locates concepts of secularity firmly within the debate about the role of religion in “modern” society. In such a history, the development project hardly emerges as a normatively secular enterprise of scientific modernism, but as rooted in a long history of Christian activism, “civilizing,” and providentialism, which still featured in Truman’s Point Four Speech. Yet, secularity and state neutrality were not mere later twists of this story, but an integral part from the start. Settler interests and political considerations revolved around economizing colonial progress, and Christianity alongside other religions was measured against this goal. Economic indicators and theories were also the corner stone of post-Second World War development theory, with but a very Christian notion of religion was built in as motivator or inhibitor of economic progress and as the ethical foundation of a certain political or economic system. These were largely Western debates about the role of religion in society, and inasmuch as they failed to account for the continued relevance of religious practices and institutions elsewhere, the latest turn to religion was also not rooted in a better observation of global religious dynamics, but rather in a US-American political twist, driven by neoliberalism and the Christian right. From this vantage point, the question of religion and development appears as a soliloquy of the so-called “developed” countries, a discourse with long-standing global consequences, but one that needs to be “provincialized” (Chakrabarty, 2000) in the history of the “empty signifier” of “religion” (Bergunder, 2014).

This leads back to the main question of this article as to whether this longer history of religion and development can be understood as a case of “religious engineering,” or better, whether the concept of “religious engineering” allows to make visible an ideological substratum beneath development which deserves a closer look in the study of religions. Such a discussion requires a careful consideration of terminology, because the clarification of two potential problems or

misunderstandings will help to specify further the notion of “religious engineering” and to draw important conclusions about the historical study of religion and development.

Firstly, despite the stated aim of abolishing a *sui generis* sense of religion, the adjective “religious” – as a qualifier of “engineering” – may be misread as reintroducing precisely such a *sui generis* idea of religion, in the end allowing projects of “religious engineering” to be juxtaposed with non-religious projects of social engineering. Delegating the notion of “religious” to what is “commonly referred to as religions” by actors in the field (Introduction, p. 4) will not solve this problem for the historical inquiry, which knows no such stable designations. But if “religious engineering” is not understood as an explanans but as explanandum, the reference to discursive designations points in the right direction. For what is at stake is not a common or regular understanding of “religious” projects of social engineering, but precisely how such a common or regular notion of “religious” is engineered (and re-engineered) in projects of social change. Such a project requires genealogical operations dissolving present notions of “religious engineering” and reconstructing their complex descent and emergence (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, as hopefully demonstrated in this article, a notion such as “faith-based organization” is not the latest turn in a “religious engineering” discourse, but a present demarcation of “religion” with roots in historical projects that have not always been about “religion” or the need to demarcate the “religious” and “secular” altogether. This also makes clear that development discourses, beyond the colonial “civilizing” projects, still deserve greater attention in the study of religions as one of the avenues by which “religion” becomes a globally and universally recognized category.

Secondly, the term “engineering” also requires some clarification. A common understanding of engineering would imply a level of intentionality, planning, and technical ability that may well exceed the haphazard and political nature of articulations about religion and development as studied in this article. Furthermore, engineering evokes the image of new constructions, perhaps on old foundations or with recycled components, but a novel product nonetheless. Yet, the history of articulations about the role of religion in progress and development uncovers much more subtle

mutations and transformations, but also continuities and reversals that do not exactly chime with the assumed character of engineering projects. These remarks do not aim to critique the concept as such, but seek to reiterate that the metaphor of “engineering” pertains mainly to the sterility of ideological visions with their teleological aspirations, claims to novelty, and motivational rhetoric. These should not be confused with the complexities and struggles of instantiating such visions, which need to be studied alongside such “engineering” articulations, with the aim of highlighting elements and alternative histories that such visions seek to subjugate and which nonetheless “interrupt and punctuate” their logic (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 64). Therefore, a “religious engineering” approach to the history of religion and development requires more than a critical analysis of development discourse and its ideological roots in Judeo-Christian teleologies of salvation, as demanded by the quote at the outset of this article and as hopefully shown along the way. It also requires more than what this article was able to deliver: to cast a light on the “provincial” nature of these development visions by showing their continuing failure to integrate institutions, practices, politics, and histories, which are not forward-looking to the latest turn in an essentially Christian debate about the relationship of church and state in societal visions of justice and progress.

Notes

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- i ?This article is an expanded version of the historical argument put forth by in a recent book chapter by Jörg Haustein and Emma Tomalin (2017).
 - ii ?Eltis (1987, p. 99) estimates that the various anti-slave trade enforcement vessels, the absolute majority of which were British, intercepted about one fifth of all slaving vessels, but only 1/16 of the slaves shipped across the Atlantic. At the same time, British mercantile infrastructure and interests dominated the West African coast.
 - iii ?England was mainly concerned with preventing slave exports to and from Zanzibar, which actually ended up fuelling the slave market along the caravan routes in the interior (Deutsch, 2004, p. 25). Bismarck, on the other hand, had instructed his Consul General in Zanzibar not to involve himself in any slavery matters, even after signing the Congo Act (Schneppen, 2006, p. 40).
 - iv ?There is more to be done in this area of research. While post-colonial scholarship in recent decades has highlighted the multiple ways in which the modern scholarship on “religion” has emerged as a result of colonialism, I am not aware of a systematic study of the notions of progress and development in this body of scholarship.
 - v ?A current project by Emma Tomalin and Jörg Haustein investigates how religious actors have been and are involved in the programming and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ethiopia, India, and the United Kingdom, see <https://religions-and-development.leeds.ac.uk/research-network>. First results from the India and the United Kingdom suggest that while the framework may be helpful for religious actors in some respects, it has not really altered the essential flows of programming development to include religious voices.