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Modern-Day Missionaries? NGOs in Contemporary Kenya in Historical Perspective

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INTRODUCTION

The "NGO-isation" of Kenyan society continues apace. In 2008 alone, as many as 6,000 NGOs were operating in the country, up from only 511 in 1996.[1] These organisations profess to provide essential services, and they are said to "contribute to the needed democratization of African countries by pluralizing and strengthening civil society".[2] However, a critical literature has emerged which has challenged this conventional narrative. In particular, it has asked whom northern NGOs are accountable to: do they represent the interests of the Kenyans that they claim to be alleviating out of poverty, or are they instead 'foot-soldiers' for Western governments' neoliberal and neocolonial agendas?[3] From this perspective, despite often harbouring good intentions, NGOs legitimise and even promote the harmful practices and ideas of their donor base. Consequently, a number of historians and political scientists have drawn the link between NGOs and missionaries during the era of formal colonial rule

[1] Julie Hearn, "The 'NGO-Isation' of Kenyan Society: USAID & the Restructuring of Health Care", *Review of African Political Economy*, 25, 75 (1998): 89-100; Julie Hearn, "African NGOs: The New Compradors?", *Development and Change*, 38, 6 (2007): 1095-1110; Jennifer N. Brass, "Blurring Boundaries: The Integration of NGOs into Governance in Kenya", *Governance*, 25, 2 (2012): 209.
[2] Alan Fowler, "The Role of NGOs in Changing State-Society Relations: Perspectives from Eastern and Southern Africa", *Development Policy Review*, 9, 1 (1991): 60.
[3] Yimovie Sakue-Collins, "(Un)doing development: a postcolonial enquiry of the agenda and agency of NGOs in Africa", *Third World Quarterly*, 42, 5 (2021): 976-995.

– pronouncing that Western NGOs are 'the new missionaries', albeit saving bodies rather than souls.[1]

However, such claims have not, as of yet, been assessed in detail. This dissertation will do so, putting NGOs under the microscope through a sustained comparative analysis of their contemporary practices and ideas in relation to missionaries operating in the Kenya colony in the first half of the twentieth century. Kenya provides the ideal location for such a case study, due to its status as a hub for NGOs and colonial-era missionaries alike. Of course, this is no coincidence. As Joanna Lewis argues, official development practices introduced by the British colonial administration in Kenya provided the roots for contemporary development practice.[2] I will focus on two NGOs in particular, Christian Aid and World Vision International (WVI), who both engage with humanitarian and development-related issues in Kenya. Due to their faith-based orientation, these are especially relevant for this case study. WVI, in particular, has its roots in its missionary activities in the 1950s, from which it evolved into a humanitarian relief agency, while Christian Aid also "evolved out of a network" of overseas missionary societies and charitable bodies.[3] As various scholars point out, however, these organisations engage in very similar areas to secular NGOs and matters of faith rarely actually feature in their programmes.[4] Instead, Christian Aid simply take as their aim the creation of "a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty".[5] Likewise, WVI are "dedicated to working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice".[6] This study will compare the discourse and practice of these NGOs with that of missionary organisations operating in Kenya during the era of formal British colonial rule, with a specific focus on the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the United Methodist Missionary Society (UMMS). It will do so through the

[1] For example, Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History* (Cambridge, 2020); Firoze Manji and Carl O'Coill, "The Missionary Position: NGOs and Development in Africa", *International Affairs*, 78, 3 (2002): 567-583.
[2] Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War & Welfare in Kenya, 1925-52* (Oxford, 2000).
[3] David King, "The New Internationalists: World Vision and the Revival of American Evangelical Humanitarianism, 1950-2010", in *Religions*, 3, 4 (2012): 922-949; Manji and O'Coill, 572.
[4] Michael Jennings, Matthew Clarke, Simon Feeny, Gill Westhorp and Cara Donohue, "A Potent Fuel? Faith Identity and Development Impact in World Vision Community Programming", *Journal of International Development*, 33, 1 (2021): 70-85; Megan Hershey, "Understanding the Effects of Faith: A Comparison of Religious and Secular HIV Prevention NGOS in Kenya", *Journal of International Development*, 28, 2 (2016): 161-176.
[5] Christian Aid, *Annual Report and Accounts, 2019/20*, 2.
[6] World Vision, *About Us,* https://www.wvi.org/about-us-9 [Accessed: 1 September 2021].

analysis of Christian Aid and WVI's magazines and webpages, the annual reports of both the missionary societies and the NGOs, the first-hand accounts of missionaries, and newspaper articles. If, indeed, the discourse and practice of the NGOs studied here are reminiscent of the colonial-era missionaries before them, this will entail a number of significant wider implications. Most importantly, it would surely necessitate a re-evaluation of their very existence, if we wish to seek a truly decolonial future.

The first part of this dissertation will outline the debate surrounding NGOs, and the role they play in advancing a neocolonial world order, in more detail. This dissertation will then proceed to test the validity of critical perspectives of NGOs through a forensic comparison with missionaries: while many have drawn the links between the work of NGOs and that of their missionary predecessors, no one has empirically examined this association in depth. The second section will explore the extent to which NGOs, like missionaries before them, do act as agents of (neo)colonialism. It will highlight, specifically, their anti-political understanding of the causes of poverty, which results in their opposition to systemic change and the encouragement of Western intervention in African affairs. However, the narrative is not quite as straightforward as this in all cases, as the continued comparative analysis in the third part of the dissertation will show. Yet, even on the occasions where NGOs do challenge the forces of capitalism and colonialism, I argue, they stop short of actually offering a real challenge to the world order.

Before beginning, however, it is important to note some limitations and constraints to a study of this type. Firstly, the objective of this comparative study is primarily to assess the extent to which NGOs are agents of (neo)colonialism, or modern-day missionaries. As such, it will not be able to explore, in much detail, the exact extent to which missionary efforts did go hand-in-hand with the colonial project.[1] However, as will become clear, the missionary sources consulted do generally corroborate Walter Rodney's view that "missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense,

[1] I will briefly outline this debate later in the dissertation; however, for a nuanced, historical view of the missionary enterprise and its relation to colonialism, see Norman Etherington (ed.) *Missions and Empire* (Oxford, 2007). Again, to clarify, missionary sources are used in this dissertation primarily as a means through which to critically analyse contemporary NGOs.

whether or not they saw themselves in that light".[1] Another limitation concerns the available source base. The records that NGOs, in particular, leave behind are largely written sources intended specifically for a wider audience. Nevertheless, the analysis of discourse in general opens up various avenues for investigation and critique. For example, does their rhetoric contain the same assumptions that underlay that of missionaries in the colonial era? Does it represent a transformative conception of the world, or alternatively one that upholds the structures of power? Questions of this sort will be addressed throughout the analysis. Finally, given the scope of this dissertation, Kenyan reactions to, and interactions with, NGOs have unfortunately not been considered. Due to various reasons, the field work required for a study of this sort was not possible. As such, it will not be able to go into much detail regarding Kenyan society and its internal dynamics, nor will it be able to offer particular local political solutions. Instead, a narrower focus on western NGOs allows for more in-depth analysis, especially in relation to their similarity with colonial-era missionaries. This dissertation will, however, conclude by pointing to ways in which NGOs can potentially escape the colonial paradigm altogether.

REVIEWING EXTANT DEBATES

In the mainstream media and academic literature alike, "a glowing picture of NGOs" has been projected since the end of the Cold War.[2] This traditional view holds that NGOs represent the democratization of world politics, and that they advance universalist goals that look to improve the human condition. According to this interpretation, they are accountable to people on the ground and, in the words of former World Bank senior advisor Michael Cernea, they embody "a philosophy that recognizes the centrality of people in development policies".[3] For their champions, NGOs hold sway in Africa today because they have proven their ability to alleviate people from poverty. Michael Bratton, for instance, concludes that they "have a comparative advantage over international donor agencies, national governments and

[1] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, D.C., 1982), 252.
[2] Thomas Davies, "Introducing NGOs and International Relations", in T. Davies (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of NGOs and International Relations* (Abingdon, 2019), 1.
[3] Quoted in David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji, *Non-Governmental Organizations and Development* (Abingdon, 2009), 16.

private firms when addressing the basic needs of the rural poor".[1] However, the prevalence of this view, according to Opoku-Mensah, Lewis and Tvedt, is a result of the lack of in-depth empirical research and critical theorising. Instead, the literature has been "strongly influenced by policy rhetoric", often penned by NGO practitioners-turned-researchers, and has, therefore, "uncritically sustained a set of potentially untenable 'myths'".[2] Moreover, these interpretations rest on a view of 'development' as the objective pursuit of progress, and humanitarianism as a purely emancipatory project. For example, Michael Barnett pronounces that "although it is fashionable to call humanitarians the new missionaries, it is more accurate to call them the new alchemists, given their attempt to harness the science of the day to transform social, political, economic, and cultural relations so that individuals can lead more productive, healthy, and dignified lives". NGOs, he makes sure to add, are nonetheless "on much firmer ground than the original alchemists".[3] In other words, they are simply in the business of improving lives (although this is no easy science).

However, critical perspectives have become increasingly common, and a number of scholars have started to pay attention to the questions of power inherent to the practice of development and humanitarianism. Costas Douzinas, for example, posits that humanitarianism's focus on the innocent victim leads to "an anti-politics", whereby attention is actually directed away from "the collective action that would change the causes of poverty, disease or war".[4] Roberto Belloni takes this further, arguing that, by obscuring from the real reasons of poverty and "elevat[ing] the West as the realm of reason, modernity and tolerance", humanitarianism only "reproduces the unequal power relationship between the West and the less developed world".[5] Others have drawn the link between the Western project of development and that of the civilizing mission, pointing to the fundamental premise underlying both: "Africans could eventually govern themselves, but not until they were enlightened through western

[1] Michael Bratton, "The politics of government-NGO relations in Africa", *World Development*, 17, 4 (1989): 569.
[2] Paul Opoku-Mensah, David Lewis, and Terje Tvedt, *Reconceptualising NGOs and Their Roles in Development: NGOs, Civil Society and the International Aid System* (Aalborg, 2007), 10-11, 20-21.
[3] Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, 2011), 39.
[4] Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (London, 2007), 84.
[5] Roberto Belloni, "The Trouble with Humanitarianism", *Review of International Studies*, 33, 3 (2007): 454-455.

intervention".[1] Scholars adopting a postcolonial perspective, meanwhile, have drawn attention to the ontological assumptions that undergird the development discourse. Eiman Zein-Elabdin suggests reading development as a colonial discourse, which is involved in the construction of "a structured set of hierarchical representations of different cultures that justifies 'conquest'".[2] As Stefan Andreasson points out, this hierarchy justifies conquest precisely because it contains "the essential idea that solutions to African problems are not readily found in African realities themselves".[3] Aram Ziai builds on this interpretation, emphasising how "this system of representation does not merely function to justify imperial policy", but that "the knowledge produced here also serves to construct identities". This, in turn, enables the (neo)colonial power to "employ barbaric practices" which are, at the same time, "designated as entirely rational", as civilizing.[4] What this shines a light on is the epistemological struggle that Africans are faced with: not only does the development narrative justify Western intervention in their political affairs, but it also prevents them from challenging this intervention altogether. Northern NGOs like Christian Aid and WVI, who take as their purpose the projects of development and humanitarianism in the global South, are heavily implicated in these critiques. Hence, Maurice Amutabi ascribes NGOs the role not of alchemists, as Barnett proposes, but "witchdoctors", who misrepresent the continent, "'diagnosing' them with bizarre ailments", in order to prescribe them with their own potions.[5]

Alongside this literature, the inner workings of NGOs are also being scrutinized more directly. A critical scholarship has resultantly arisen which specifically calls into question their accountability and legitimacy. Edwards and Hulme, writing in the mid-1990s, warn about the negative implications of the New Policy Agenda – a neoliberal approach to development in which the state is assigned a reduce role in social welfare provision, with a greater responsibility placed upon non-state actors. "The danger is

[1] Decker & McMahon, 176.
[2] Eiman Zein-Elabdin, "Postcoloniality and Development: Development as a Colonial Discourse", in L. Keita (ed.), *Philosophy and African Development: Theory and Practice* (Dakar, 2011), 221.
[3] Stefan Andreasson, "Orientalism and African Development Studies: the 'reductive repetition' motif in theories of African underdevelopment", *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 6 (2005): 973.
[4] Aram Ziai, *Development Discourse and Global History: From colonialism to the sustainable development goals* (Abingdon, 2016), 27-28.
[5] Maurice Amutabi, *The NGO Factor in Africa: The Case of Arrested Development in Kenya* (New York, 2006), xxvii.

that NGO accountability will be skewed to the most powerful of 'stakeholders' – the donors", rather than the people they claim to be representing. This leads them to conclude that "there are sufficient warning signals to alert all NGOs to the possibility of being co-opted by official agencies into the role of implementers of the New Policy Agenda".[1] Writing over a decade and a half later, Alan Fowler confirms these fears, finding that, for NGOs, "the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century was characterized by shrinking room to maneuver and cooptation into the mainstream foreign aid system".[2] Similarly, Julie Hearn outlines how, due to this current policy environment, WVI have become "involve[d] in a number of key objectives of US government policy" in Kenya, including "the privatisation of health care and the non-governmental provision of food security".[3] The ramifications of this for Kenyans are huge. What we are seeing is welfare provision relegated at the expense of the interests of Western capital, and the institutionalisation of external influence in Kenya. For NGOs, this calls into question the extent of their 'non-governmental' nature, and, perhaps more importantly, it raises important questions about their relationship with neocolonialism.

Christian Aid claim to overcome these issues of accountability through their model of 'partnership'. "We carry out our relief, development and advocacy work through more than 500 local organisations, which are close to the people and communities we seek to help and so best understand their needs", they profess.[4] However, the concept of partnership has also been subject to critical interpretation. Yash Tandon describes the local organisations that Christian Aid work through as "appendages of Northern agencies", "comprador NGOs" who "act essentially as agents of Western parameters, to divert attention from the root causes of African poverty, to pacify and to peddle Western values and civilisation".[5] Hearn corroborates this view, arguing that "foreign

[1] Michael Edwards and David Hulme, "NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War World", *Journal of International Development*, 7, 6 (1995): 853-854.
[2] Alan Fowler, "Development NGOs" in M. Edwards (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society* (Oxford, 2011) 50.
[3] Julie Hearn, "The 'Invisible' NGO: US Evangelical Missions in Kenya", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32, 1 (2002): 34.
[4] Christian Aid, *How We Operate*, https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/what-we-do/how-we-operate [Accessed: 1 September 2021]
[5] Yash Tandon, "An African Perspective" in D. Sogge (ed.), *Compassion and Calculation: The Business of Private Foreign Aid* (London: 1996), 184.

aid to Southern NGOs has created a social group that is dependent on external resources and patronage and in return is central to and popularizes Northern development policy".[1] Consequently, the NGO-isation of Kenyan society, while seeming relatively innocuous at first glance, actually represents more than simply the proliferation of NGOs. Instead, it signifies the increasing influence and control of Western governments over the lives of Kenyans, and thus a threat to their very self-determination.

All this has led some scholars to conclude that NGOs are "ideological foot soldiers", or "the advanced guard", fighting "in the service of imperialism" in Africa.[2] Yolana Pringle's case study of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during the Mau Mau rebellion illustrates this perspective. She finds that "the ICRC, wittingly or unwittingly, became entangled in [the] lies, cover-ups, and deceptions" of the British Government and Kenya's Colonial Administration, who went to lengths to hide "the systematic violence with which they dealt with detainees in Kenya's detention camps". She uncovers how the ICRC were made complicit with colonial abuses due to their reliance on the British government for access to the camps and for information, resulting in their reports echoing the official interpretation of events.[3] This study illuminates the dangers attendant to NGOs' close relationship with Western governments, and displays how an uncritical approach can leave them facilitating forms of colonial violence and domination, however noble their intentions.

It is this close relationship with Western powers, combined with the colonial nature of the development discourse, that has led many scholars to draw the link between the role played by NGOs in the current era of development, and that of missionaries during the era of formal colonial rule in Africa.[4] Others have located the origins of the charitable thrust at the core of the NGO enterprise in the work of missionaries in the British empire, and have pointed out the assumptions of civilizational superiority which

[1] Hearn, "New Compradors", 1107-1108.
[2] Sakue-Collins, 976; Tandon, 182; James Petras, "NGOs: In the service of imperialism", *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 29, 4 (1999): 429-430.
[3] Yolana Pringle, "Humanitarianism, Race and Denial: the International Committee of the Red Cross and Kenya's Mau Mau Rebellion, 1952–60", *History Workshop Journal*, 84, 1 (2017): 90-91.
[4] See, for example, Joe Hanlon, *Mozambique: Who Calls the Shots* (Bloomington: 1991); Tandon, 182; Amutabi, xxx; Anna Simons, *Networks of Dissolution: Somalia Undone* (Oxford, 1995), 205.

has underlined the work of both missionaries and NGOs.[1] For Decker and McMahon, NGOs are, in no uncertain terms, "the new missionaries…replicating the relations of power embedded in the civilizing mission of earlier centuries", but "this time saving lives rather than souls".[2] Manji and O'Coill similarly pronounce that NGOs occupy "the missionary position" in their relations with Africans: despite adopting "the verbiage of participatory approaches", their work is rooted in paternalism and "contributes marginally to the relief of poverty, but significantly to undermining the struggle of African people to emancipate themselves from economic, social and political oppression".[3]

In this dissertation, I look to assess these claims, along with the general credibility of the critical scholarship altogether, through the direct comparison between Christian Aid, WVI and the missionaries operating in the Kenya colony before them. Before doing so, it is necessary to return briefly to the debate surrounding the legacy of missions during the colonial era. Many historians have called for nuance in their assessment of the enterprise. Andrew Porter, for instance, affirms that arguments suggesting that missionaries were agents of cultural imperialism are "seriously exaggerated", and emphasises "the limits both to their ability to control the influence of their message, and to its diffusion among the population".[4] Instead, he claims, "religion and empire frequently mingled, but were as likely to undermine each other as they were to provide mutual support".[5] Brian Stanley, likewise, contends that missionaries' "relationship to the diverse forces of British imperialism was complex and ambiguous".[6] Echoing Porter and Stanley, Norman Etherington suggests that it may be because the spread of Christianity in Asia and Africa "coincided with the spread of European economic and political hegemony", that "it tends to be taken for granted as a reflex of imperialism". However, in reality, "the whole relationship between Christian

[1] Deborah Brautigam, *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa* (Oxford, 2009); Douzinas, 83.
[2] Decker and McMahon, 165, 180.
[3] Manji and O'Coill, 568, 581.
[4] Andrew Porter, "'Cultural imperialism' and protestant missionary enterprise, 1780–1914", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 25, 3 (1997): 367, 383.
[5] Andrew Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm and Empire", in A. Porter (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 222.
[6] Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Leicester, 1990), 184.

missions and the Empire is problematic".[1] These scholars generally point to how missionaries often opposed colonial administrations as much as they worked with them, and how the missionary enterprise was heterogeneous and lacking a consensus on its political goals. Moreover, they highlight how "imperialism" is a "slippery term", and urge caution in simplifications of its experience.[2] These points are, of course, all valid. However, by focusing on the complexities and contradictions of both imperialism and the missionary enterprise, these scholars generally serve to distract from the larger picture, especially for the purposes of this dissertation. Ultimately, as Jean and John Comaroff maintain, missionaries were, wittingly or unwittingly, "the most active cultural agents of empire, being driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the 'native' world in the name of God and European civilization".[3] This leads Max Montgomery to conclude that "the majority of Christian missionaries…functioned as quasi-colonial agents and incubators of Western norms and values".[4] Indeed, even those that call for caution in assessing missionaries' relationship with empire admit that "a strong case can be made for the missionary station as a microcosm or trope of Empire. Like the explorer, the missionary arrived in regions barely touched by Western influences, preaching the superiority of Western religion, technology and cultural practices".[5]

As such, this dissertation will generally read similarities to missionaries as evidence of NGOs' neocolonial nature. It will, however, also account for the nuances pointed out by the likes of Porter. In fact, many of the same arguments apply to NGOs as well. For Michael Jennings, NGOs are not simply "contracted agents for Northern donors", or "ciphers for rich nations"; instead, "the real story is fuller, more complex, and less linear than this mythical creation suggests". What the narrative is missing, he argues, is a consideration of "how NGOs were shaped by the periphery".[6] The main point here is that NGOs are not simply appendages to Western governments, or uncomplicated political agents for their foreign policy goals. As will become evident throughout this

[1] Norman Etherington, "Introduction", in Etherington (ed.), *Missions*, 1-2.
[2] Porter, "'Cultural Imperialism'", 372.
[3] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago, 1991), 6.
[4] Max Montgomery, "Colonial Legacy of Gender Inequality: Christian Missionaries in German East Africa", *Politics & Society*, 45, 2 (2017): 226.
[5] Etherington, 4.
[6] Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, CT., 2008), 2-3.

dissertation, they engaged with both Western governments and Kenyan communities in various and complex ways, and as we proceed this complexity is important to bear in mind.

AGENTS OF (NEO)COLONIALISM

Tanja Müller provides a detailed outline of the "anti-political" understanding of poverty held by most northern NGOs. She explains how humanitarianism "manufactures a truth about 'Africa' and other places perceived as destitute that legitimises the global hegemonic system and removes its victims 'from the everyday realities of the western world'".[1] In other words, NGOs are involved in the construction of an image of Africa in which it is presented as helpless and destitute, as if it is almost confined to a perpetual condition of poverty. As an example, she draws on the Save the Children campaign for the 2011 famine in Somalia. She describes a video released for the campaign, which "depicts an almost biblical landscape, windswept and dusty, animals lie dead, people are being buried, children are close to starvation, mothers queue at feeding centres – a quasi-prototypical representation of famine in Africa…The only mention of the cause of the famine refers to 'the worst drought in decades'".[2] This same imagery is widespread in the accounts of Christian Aid and WVI. *World Vision* magazine in the summer of 2017, for example, describes the "hunger crisis" in northern Kenya: "grasslands have turned into graveyards as the carcasses of donkeys, cattle, sheep, and goats litter the landscape, their ribcages white mounds jutting from the brown dirt". "When we see our children so hungry, we feel like committing suicide", a Kenyan mother is said to have remarked. And again, the underlying causes of the crisis are obscured: "this crisis has no single cause, but climate is a big contributor".[3] Meanwhile, a *Christian Aid News* article from 2000 pronounces that "there's been much bad news from Africa recently…continuing low-level conflict in many African countries; growing numbers of refugees needing food,

[1] Tanja Müller, "The Long Shadow of Band Aid Humanitarianism: revisiting the dynamics between famine and celebrity", *Third World Quarterly*, 34, 3 (2013): 471.
[2] Ibid., 476.
[3] Kari Costanza, "East Africa: Battlefield of Hunger", *World Vision Magazine*, 20, 3 (2017): 16-18.

water and shelter; growing pockets of hunger caused by crop failures; extreme climate changes; and the spread of HIV/AIDS".[1] Here, the continent is cast as a place of disorder, tragedy and death – due to the prevalence of disease, its climate, and internecine conflict – and poverty is presented as an inherent, cultural or geographical, rather than political, phenomenon. Hidden from the picture are the decades of domination, dispossession and unequal exchange that resulted from, in Jason Hickel's words, "a world economic system that was designed over hundreds of years to enrich a small portion of humanity at the expense of the vast majority".[2]

This same imagery is evident in the accounts of missionaries, who more obviously conceived of Africa as a place of darkness and chaos. One UMMS missionary reporting on his trip to Ngao in Kenya explains how, having "felt and seen the dense darkness", he "realized the magnitude of the missionary task".[3] Another CMS report, meanwhile, lauds "exploration and Christianity" for the role it has played in establishing order, in the face of the "dark deeds and cruelty" that had previously "disfigured" the continent.[4] What is evident in these accounts is the rhetoric of the civilizing mission, and proof of how missionaries conceived of themselves as central to it. However, we also see the idea, prevalent too in the accounts of NGOs (albeit less explicitly), that Africa is intrinsically disordered: the darkness can not only be seen, but felt. In an attempt to remedy this disorder, missionaries turned to charity. For example, the UMMS distributed Christian literature throughout Africa, arguing that "there is nothing Africa needs more".[5] In a similar vein, WVI implore readers to donate a goat to an African family, emphasising that "a single act of generosity can cascade into more gifts that enable families to climb out of poverty".[6] For Müller, this is further evidence of anti-politics, as the focus on acts of charity as a solution to poverty "leaves the structural conditions that have caused suffering not only unchanged but unrecognised, unanalysed and un-understood".[7] The similarity in NGOs conceptions of Africa with that of missionaries, and the likeness of their respective solutions, suggests a

[1] "Africa – where's the good news?", *Christian Aid News*, 9 (2000): 21.
[2] Jason Hickel, *The Divide: A Brief Guide to Global Inequality and its Solutions* (London, 2017), 101.
[3] C. Stedeford, "The Doings of the Deputation", *The Missionary Echo*, vol. xxx (1923): 5.
[4] *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society, 1923-1924* (London, 1924), 2-3.
[5] Canon Rowling, "Christian Literature in Africa", *Missionary Echo*, vol. xxx (1923): 192.
[6] Laura Reinhardt, "A Gift That Keeps Giving", *World Vision Magazine*, 21, 1 (2017): 14.
[7] Müller, 480-481.

continuity in their underlying assumptions and understandings. This perspective, moreover, inhibits the possibility of actual transformative political action, and instead reproduces the hierarchies that prevailed during the era of colonialism; this is because "the focus on the destitute presupposes a condition of inequality, dividing humanity into suffering victims and those who have the power to intervene in their fate".[1]

The saviour/victim binary is one of an ensemble of differences perpetuated by the development discourse, which continues to "define non-Western people in terms of their perceived divergence from the cultural standards of the West".[2] In asserting that "Kenya grapples with weak governance…underdeveloped infrastructure, high income inequality and high unemployment", and in underlining their role in "promoting hope as an alternative to hatred and promoting development as an alternative to…many of the problems that take root in failed states, weakened governments, and bad economies", both Christian Aid and WVI adopt the reductive binarism of this discourse.[3] Here, "failed" states are implicitly contrasted to "successful" states, "bad" economies to "good" ones, "weak" governance to "strong" governance, and "underdeveloped" infrastructure to "developed" infrastructure. In each case, the Western standard is the most desirable. As Branwen Gruffydd Jones explains, this obscures from the actual "historical and global relations of current conditions and processes in Africa", as "the past of colonialism and the present of international intervention are sidelined", and replaced by a simplified narrative in which poverty and political instability in Africa is caused by its perceived difference to the West. She also contends that "these current ideas are situated in a much longer genealogy of imperial discourse".[4] Certainly, looking at the dualistic rhetoric adopted by missionaries, it is easy to see the continuities. One CMS report quotes a Kenyan, who supposedly laments: "we are still in darkness, our eyes are not yet enlightened. We cannot get on by ourselves".[5] Another CMS missionary encapsulates the common view, explaining how "the

[1] Ibid.
[2] Manji and O'Coill, 574.
[3] Christian Aid, *Christian Aid in Kenya*, https://www.christianaid.org.uk/our-work/where-we-work/kenya [Accessed: 1 September 2021]; Jonny Cruz, "Michael Gerson on: Reasons to Hope in the Fight Against Poverty", *World Vision Magazine*, 20, 4 (2017): 12.
[4] Branwen Gruffydd Jones, "'Good governance' and 'state failure': genealogies of imperial discourse", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26, 1 (2013): 52-53.
[5] *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society, 1922-1923* (London, 1923), 35.

fundamental outlook of the civilized, clothed European on the pagan, naked African…is one of superiority, and it is loath to admit that the rights of Africans are the same as those of the European".[1] We also see here how these binaries justify colonial intervention and domination: the civilized, superior European is morally obliged to bring 'light' to the 'dark' continent and is, additionally, justified in his denial of the uncivilized, inferior African's rights. Therefore, NGOs, like missionaries before them, are seen to adopt a discourse which makes use of binaries that serve to justify intervention and domination. This is because it simplifies complex relationships and histories, and thus directs attention away from the real causes of poverty. Instead, the problem is presented as the African's way of life, and the solution is to be found in the West.

This is, in fact, the fundamental underlying tenet of both the NGOs' and missionaries' endeavours. Missionaries in Kenya repeatedly allude to the Africans' primitive and inferior nature in their reports and publications. They do this through directly portraying the Kenyans they interact with as "a people of meagre intelligence", or alternatively emphasising the lack of law and order in Kenyan communities, for example through reference to the "recrudescence of slave raiding" or "the prevalence of witchcraft".[2] Meanwhile, a missionary in Meru, eastern Kenya, describes "a people living under the crudest conditions, who know no law save that of unbridled passion".[3] Central to this was the idea that indigenous values and customs held Africans back, providing an obstacle to economic progress. Methodist missionary Arthur Hopkins, for example, attributes the lack of "civilization" in a community in east Kenya to "the hideous fatalism" of its traditional religion, which "destroys all initiative".[4] Hence, the main focus of the UMMS in Kenya centred around "emancipation from static traditional custom", or, in other words, saving Africans from their own culture.[5] The CMS were also engaged in the same project of liberating Kenyans from "the deadening inertia produced by oppression and native customs". Therefore, a 1925 report celebrates the

[1] "Christianity in Kenya: Archdeacon Owen's Frank Review", *Manchester Guardian*, 15 March 1927, 12.
[2] "Portrait of a Missionary", n.d. but *c*.1950-1964, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Archives, London, MMS/17/02/11/01/02/01; *Annual Report of the CMS 1923-1924*, 2-3.
[3] "The Work of our Women's Auxiliary", *Missionary Echo*, vol. xxx (1923): 59-60.
[4] Arthur Hopkins, *Trail Blazers and Road Makers: A brief history of the East Africa Mission of the United Methodist Church* (London, 1928), 13.
[5] "Tragic Death of a Great African Methodist minister", 1952, SOAS, MMS/17/02/11/01/02/04.

fact that “the whole youth of the country has been stirred by new ideas, brought in, not only by the Mission, but by the settler”.[1] Through displaying the close alignment in both missionary and settler aims, this source also points to something even more sinister. As Opolot Okia displays, after forced labour was abolished by the British government in the early 1920s, the colonial administration in Kenya “manipulated communal labour as an atavistic justification for forced labour”, and “young boys and girls were frequently found in great numbers on many communal labour projects”.[2] Given the timing of this CMS report and its endorsement of the “new ideas” introduced by the settler community, it does suggest complicity with the colonial project of forced labour. Significantly, this provides evidence of how the missionaries’ adoption of the dualistic colonial discourse ended up facilitating forms of colonial oppression, and thus necessitates that we treat seriously any evidence of NGOs doing the same.

And by placing emphasis on corruption and bad governance, WVI are guilty of exactly this – explaining poverty as a consequence of African customs and practices. “Greedy brokers” are blamed for the struggles of farmers failing to make a profit, while “saboteurs and thieves” in the Kenyan Health Department and public works are blamed for the prevalence of disease and the fact that patients in public hospitals “were being left to die”.[3] No mention is ever made of the structural adjustment policies which forcefully curtailed public investment in social services and opened up African markets to exploitative Western capitalists, let alone the legacies of colonialism. They also more explicitly take aim at African culture and values. For example, as part of an “innovative program called Securing Africa’s Future”, WVI look to set in motion a “mindset shift”, centred around teaching Africans that “they have the power to make lasting change”, in order to overcome the “ruin” caused by “destructive cultural values”.[4] The implication is clear, Africans are dependent on Western aid because of their own ways of thinking. WVI President Rich Stearns actually says as much, arguing that poverty is “about values and culture”. More specifically, “every community needs

[1] *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society*, *1924-1925* (London, 1925), 5.
[2] Opolot Okia, “In the interests of community: Archdeacon Walter Owen and the issue of communal labour in colonial Kenya, 1921–30”, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 32, 1 (2004): 22, 31.
[3] Kari Costanza, “From Dependence to Dignity”, *World Vision Magazine*, 18, 1 (2014): 18; “Working to Save Children”, *World Vision Magazine* (June-July, 1997): 7.
[4] Costanza, “From Dependence”, 14-18.

productive and healthy values and knowledge so that children are protected…and men seek the welfare of their families rather than their next drink".[1] This idea of the drunk, irresponsible African man holding back the continent, moreover, is not a new one. A central aim of the CMS in Kenya revolved around changing drinking habits, as "the African cannot drink in moderation; he always drinks to get drunk".[2] This is a convenient story, as the solution to poverty becomes bible teaching and change on the individual, rather than structural level – and this explains its adoption by both missionaries and faith-based NGOs – but it is deeply misleading and, ultimately, it provides the perfect justification for the continued encroachment of Western interests in Africa.

This provides evidence to support Andreasson's claim that the development discourse reduces "the many heterogeneous characteristics of African societies into a core set of deficiencies". The consequence of these deficiencies being internal, is that the "solutions must at some point originate externally: development as *deus ex machina*".[3] For northern development NGOs, this underlies most of their work. Stearns, offering a solution to the problem of African culture, asserts that "the community needs the knowledge provided by leadership development, farmers' co-ops, opportunities for youth; it also needs the values found in church, savings groups, and gender education programs".[4] The idea that Africans need the knowledge and values found in Western societies is, again, one that was passionately put forward by missionaries. Hopkins, for example, speaks of the European as "the greatest man who ever trod the soil of Africa…carrying his flaming torch into the darkest places".[5] Moreover, in mission schools, Western conceptions of time and work were forced on the Kenyan youth. Contemporary historian Roland Oliver explains how "life was regulated almost as severely by the mission bell as it was in England by the factory hooter", and days were structured around prayer and work.[6] The importance of this should not be understated: indeed, the "clock is the fundamental instrument for inculcating the organizational

[1] Rich Stearns, "Solving the Puzzle of Poverty", *World Vision Magazine*, 18, 4 (2015): 6.
[2] *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society, 1930-1931* (London, 1931), 76.
[3] Andreasson, 972-973.
[4] Stearns, "Solving the Puzzle", 6.
[5] Hopkins, *Trail Blazers*, 1.
[6] Roland Oliver, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa* (London: 1952), 52.

forms of capitalist production", as it renders labour "measurable in terms that permit its transfer from worker to employer".[1]

While Christian Aid and WVI have left out the racial element, their "flaming torch" bringing light to the "dark" continent is not too different to what it was for Hopkins: Western capitalism and the values that accompany it. For example, Christian Aid's correspondence from the 1970s displays how they have funded organisations that have looked to help Kenyans "manage sound enterprises within a realistic economic framework", by providing "practical business experiences from the U.S.A.".[2] Note, here, that Christian Aid's 'partnership' model does not stop them from exporting the ideas of Western capitalism, as they end up funding local organisations that align with the broader aims of the Western development project – a phenomenon that Hearn and Tandon (above) caution about. Today, NGOs set up microfinance institutions, such as WVI's Vision Fund, which provide loans for small businesses. In one magazine article, we are told the story of Grace, "a single mother with nine children, no husband, no collateral, and no business experience", who approached Vision Fund officers looking for a loan for her travel lodge. At first she was rejected but her persistence, the article explains, eventually "convinced them to take a chance on her".[3] As gender and development scholar Kalpana Wilson argues, "with its vision of women in low-income households 'making good' through entrepreneurial hard work, microfinance epitomizes the neoliberal focus on the individual, and on moving up hierarchies rather than collectively challenging or dismantling them".[4] That is, by framing the Western model of neoliberal capitalism as the solution to poverty, NGOs are perpetuating the structures which have caused poverty in the first place.

Counter to indigenous beliefs, missionaries in Kenya also advanced the idea of land as a mode of production and a medium of exchange in world markets. Taking aim at the Bantu's "old lethargic contemplation of his cattle and crops", Hopkins pronounces

[1] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa", *American Ethnologist*, 13, 1 (1986): 14.
[2] Partnership for Productivity letter to Christian Aid, 3 July 1971, SOAS, CA/CA2/01/155
[3] Kari Costanza, "Amazing Grace", *World Vision Magazine*, 19, 2 (2016): 28-29.
[4] Kalpana Wilson, "Towards a Radical Re-appropriation: Gender, Development and Neoliberal Feminism", *Development and Change*, 46, 4 (2015): 809.

that "the destiny of the African lies in his becoming an independent producer, drawing his wealth from his labour on his own soil… and contributing also to the markets of the world".[1] The work that NGOs do to integrate Kenyans into capitalist markets is reminiscent of this. Both WVI and Christian Aid, for example, look to promote and "unlock potential" in "local value chains".[2] Meanwhile, Christian Aid, advertising their own successes, declare that, since the late 1990s, "the country's narrative has changed for the better…with the GDP having grown at an average rate of 5% in the last decade".[3] By continuing to measure success according to economic growth, Christian Aid are engaging in a project which is, according to Serge Latouche, "both unsustainable and harmful, socially as well as ecologically".[4] In this sense, these NGOs are doing exactly what Christian missionaries did before them: integrating Kenyans into a capitalist system that serves to entrench inequality and exploit natural resources. Instead, Latouche argues, NGOs should focus their energy on facilitating African countries to "rediscover their own histories – interrupted by colonialism, development and globalisation". Indigenous cultural identities often "reveal inherently anti-economistic values", and it is these values which need to be revived.[5]

CHALLENGING (NEO)COLONIALISM?

All this is not to say that NGOs do not challenge their own domestic governments, or that they do not help the communities in Kenya that they claim to represent. As Jennings reminds us, the role that NGOs like WVI and Christian Aid play "is more nuanced, more widespread, and in some cases more attuned to local concerns and discourses than the fiercest critics…have allowed for".[6] Similarly, Peter Sherlock argues that missionaries "cannot be placed into simple categories of 'good' and 'bad', nor are their relations with government officials, Indigenous and settler populations

[1] A. J. Hopkins, "The Complexity of Work in East Africa", *The Missionary Echo*, vol. xxxi (1924): 164.
[2] World Vision, *World Vision Kenya Annual Report*, 2020, 12; Christian Aid, *Partnership for Change: Christian Aid in Kenya, 2020*, 4.
[3] *Christian Aid in Kenya*.
[4] Serge Latouche, "Why less should be so much more: Degrowth economics", *Le Monde Diplomatique* (English ed.), November 2004, https://mondediplo.com/2004/11/14latouche.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Michael Jennings, "'Do not turn away a poor man': faith-based organizations and development", in M. Clarke (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion* (Cheltenham, 2013), 360.

consistent from one place to another".[1] The same can equally be said about NGOs, and the ways in which they challenge Western governments, and the limits of this, are certainly evocative of their missionary predecessors.

Sherlock proceeds to point out that, for missionaries, "resistance and accommodation were possible, and in the midst of the violence implicit in colonialism, humanity – the exercise of choice and compassion – was an historical possibility".[2] As one report of UMMS activity in Kenya outlines, missionaries were involved in the provision of "education, social services, medical and sanitary developments, conservation of water and preservation of soil".[3] NGOs, too, undoubtedly do choose to exercise compassion, and are involved in providing almost identical services. Along with providing emergency food and water purification tablets during times of drought, WVI "build and rehabilitate wells, extend pipelines", and build zai pits to "capture rainfall when it comes".[4] Christian Aid, meanwhile, work alongside a local organisation which has been constructing new drains in the Matopeni slum on the outskirts of Nairobi, "to carry sewage away from the settlement" and thus help stave off diseases caused by poor sanitation.[5] Moreover, like missionaries, northern NGOs are also involved in the provision of healthcare and education in Kenya. In 2012-13 alone, WVI raised funds to build a girls' school in the North Rift Valley in Kenya, while Christian Aid helped "more than 99,500" Kenyan women and children access "vital maternal and infant healthcare".[6]

Moreover, despite their widespread adoption of colonial discourse, there is also evidence of missionaries in the Kenya Colony, and NGOs in Kenya today, looking to subvert colonial assumptions of civilizational and cultural superiority. For example, a CMS missionary who spent twenty years with the Kikuyu people from the early 1930s, expressed sympathy with their cause on the eve of the Mau Mau uprising, as reported

[1] Peter Sherlock, "Missions, Colonialism and the Politics of Agency", in A. Barry, J. Cruickshank, A. Brown-May and P. Grimshaw (eds.), *Evangelists of Empire? Missionaries in Colonial History* (Melbourne, 2008), 19.
[2] Ibid.
[3] "Tragic Death of a Great African".
[4] Costanza, "East Africa", 25-26.
[5] "Matopeni: the drain takes the strain", *Christian Aid News*, 50 (2011): 11.
[6] Margo Day, "Five Loaves and Two Fish", *World Vision Magazine*, 16, 3 (2013): 30; Christian Aid, *Annual Report and Accounts, 2012/13*, 15.

in a local newspaper: “he described them as ‘ordinary people’ who had been invaded by the Europeans”, and “went on to say that the Kikuyans were a very intelligent race…he felt that the Mau Mau had real grievances and were fighting for something they believed to be very real”.[1] This directly contradicts the views of the majority of missionaries (outlined above), not least in its overt denunciation of European colonialism. In the same vein, Christian Aid attempt, in some cases, to subvert the mainstream development discourse and display an overtly political understanding of poverty. For example, they assert their belief that “poverty is political, a scandal created and perpetuated by our own systems and structures”.[2] As such, they claim to be “challenging inequitable global rules”, and declare that their objective is to transform international economic policies in order to construct “new economic models that put human wellbeing, equality and sustainability first”.[3] They do so through organising collective action and, throughout the last decade and a half, they have lobbied Western governments for causes such as climate justice and “the cancellation of the unpayable debts of the world’s poorest countries”.[4]

In fact, Christian Aid also display a clear wariness of modern capitalism and the practices of Western governments. For example, they underline how “rich country governments, inevitably influenced by the huge transnational corporations (TNCs) that play a vital role in their own economics, dominate world trade”, and stress that current trade rules “widen the gap between the rich and poor”. They specifically target WTO policies of economic liberalization, declaring that “it’s now time to draw up new trade rules aimed at eradicating poverty”.[5] Again, this is not too dissimilar from the suspicions held by some missionaries. CMS missionary Walter Owen, speaking at a Clergy Union meeting, ruefully admits that “the missionary is as much part of modern civilisation as is government or settlers”, and that “many missionaries assault Africans”, especially through “forced labour of one kind and another in Kenya”.

[1] “Missionary gives his views on the unrest in Kenya”, *Bucks Herald*, 30 October 1953.
[2] “Poverty”, *Christian Aid News*, 44 (2009): 10-11
[3] “The politics of poverty – why do we lobby?”, *Christian Aid Magazine*, 2 (2014): 20-21; Christian Aid, *Annual Report, 2012/13*, 19-20.
[4] Christian Aid, *Annual Report, 2019/20*, 21; “Time to abolish debt slavery”, *Christian Aid News*, 1 (1998): 16.
[5] “What’s wrong with international trade rules: a beginner’s guide”, *Christian Aid News*, 14 (2001): 12-13.

Consequently, he makes a plea that "missionary forces must fight" the "forces of modern civilisation in Kenya" and the "evils to be found in Governments and settlers".[1] This displays the complex relationship between missionaries, the colonial government and white settlers: while it provides evidence that missionaries were often agents of colonialism and guilty of the same crimes, it is also, in itself, proof of how they could challenge the same forces and assumptions. In an article explaining their approach, Christian Aid state that they operate "through partner organisations rather than sending large numbers of international aid workers into poor countries, where they are far from home and hold large amounts of power and wealth".[2] By displaying an awareness of the flaws of international aid work and the power imbalances that underlie it, they express the same sentiment as Owen. In the same way that Owen critically assesses the missionary's role in colonialism, Christian Aid critically assess the role of the NGO worker in the Western development project. In both cases, we see a desire to achieve a more equitable and just relationship between Kenyans and the global North.

In all this, the similarity between NGOs and missionaries might seem innocuous, or even praiseworthy at times. However, what this comparative, historical perspective highlights are the limits of the threat that NGOs pose to capitalism and neocolonialism. This is because, despite making seemingly conscious attempts to subvert the assumptions that have characterised the development sector, NGOs like Christian Aid are not really doing anything radically different from what some missionaries did around three-quarters of a century before them. Most of the time, moreover, these missionaries were not actually transformative at all. For example, Nancy Murray displays how, "at crucial moments", Walter Owen "put his full support and influence behind the colonial system".[3] Indeed, Owen had taken over the insurgent, grassroots Young Kavirondo Association – subsequently remodelling it as the Kavirondo Taxpayers' Welfare Association – primarily to suppress African political protest and to ensure that, in the words of one CMS missionary, the association "work[ed] with the

[1] "Christianity in Kenya", 12.
[2] "The partner principle: how Christian Aid works", *Christian Aid Magazine*, 9 (2018): 5.
[3] Nancy Murray, "Archdeacon W. E. Owen: Missionary as Propagandist", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 15, 4 (1982): 653.

Administration in every possible way".[1] This leads Murray to conclude that "Owen was a faithful agent of the British 'civilizing mission' whose complex character reflected the contradictions at work in the colonial system".[2] This is an important point, missionaries ultimately reflected the societies in which they hailed from. By the same token, Barnett highlights a central tension to humanitarianism: it is "a creature of the world it aspires to civilize" and is "necessarily limited by culture, circumstance, and contingency".[3] In Owen's case, his support for the rights of Africans was limited by his deep-rooted faith in the superiority of Western capitalism which, he believed, could ultimately "serve as the agent of economic and moral uplift of the African people".[4] There is ample evidence that Christian Aid are limited in similar ways. In their correspondence with a local organisation that looked to promote economic activity in Kenya (outlined above), a Christian Aid director argues that "it is a total misapprehension to regard this scheme as a method for introducing the techniques of American private capitalism to the Third World. What they have in mind is rather to introduce the techniques of *management*…And it is the management skill which is so lacking in many parts of the Third World".[5] Despite their anti-capitalist rhetoric, they nevertheless still pose solutions rooted in capitalism. Their obliviousness to the fact that the concept of "management" is a capitalist one serves to highlight the extent to which their embeddedness in Western political economy limits their transformative potential.

This brings us to the core of the issue; not only are northern NGOs, like missionaries before them, limited by their own culture, but they are directly funded by Western governments. They are, therefore, structurally constrained from truly challenging them. If they did, they would lose their funding and risk their very existence. In 2018, WVI received over US$114 million from USAID, while, in the 2019 fiscal year, around a third of Christian Aid's total income originated from Western governments and international institutions.[6] The annual reports of the CMS, likewise, reveal that the

[1] John Lonsdale, "Political Associations in Western Kenya", in R. Rotberg & A. Mazrui (eds.), *Protest and Power in Black Africa* (New York, 1970), 606-610; *Annual Report of the CMS*, *1923-1924*, 36.
[2] Murray, 654.
[3] Barnett, 8-9.
[4] Murray, 667.
[5] "Memorandum, from Alan Booth", 16 March, 1972, SOAS, CA/CA2/01/155. Emphasis in original.
[6] World Vision International, *Accountability Report*, 2018, 17; Christian Aid, *Annual Report and Accounts*, *2018/19*, 58-65.

colonial administration provided large grants for missionary schools.[1] For missionaries, this funding shaped their agenda. The colonial administration in Kenya, in fact, actively welcomed the work of missionaries, who were able to deliver the social services that they were unwilling to provide.[2] For example, one Colonial White Paper asserts that "there is no quicker or more efficient way of…raising the standard of health and intelligence than by giving all possible assistance to the Missions".[3]

In the same way, the agendas of WVI and Christian Aid have been shaped by institutional funding – specifically, government funding has pushed them towards projects focused on African women and children. The UK Aid Match scheme, in which DfID pledges to double any donations received by Christian Aid, applies specifically to maternal and child health projects.[4] Meanwhile, WVI focus on "empowering a girl", as they believe that this is the "best way to make a difference"; in fact, "there is no 'anti-poverty intervention' more effective".[5] While this, once again, displays the anti-political focus on the individual, rather than the structural, it is also evidence of a neoliberal approach to gender equality, in which it is seen in instrumental terms: here, empowering girls is framed as simply a *means* for economic growth, rather than an *end* in and of itself. As Wilson explains, this focus only serves to "extend and deepen gendered inequalities in order to sustain and strengthen processes of global capital accumulation in several ways". This is because it "consistently portrays girls as at risk from 'cultural' practices…while invisibilizing the structural causes of poverty".[6] We can clearly see this with the European Union-funded work that Christian Aid carry out, which looks "to stop children and new mums dying" in Narok county, south-west Kenya. This project, they explain, is simply "part of the fight to save lives in Kenya":[7] on the surface, it looks like a straightforward example of "the exercise of choice and compassion", that Sherlock reminds us is possible. However, on closer inspection, we see how it is evidence of the instrumentalization of gender aims that Wilson warns

[1] *Annual Report of the CMS, 1922-1923*, 31, 38; *Annual Report of the Church Missionary Society, 1925-1926* (London, 1926), 26.
[2] Hearn, "'Invisible' NGO", 50.
[3] *The Methodist Recorder*, June 16, 1932, 1.
[4] Christian Aid, *Partnership*, 5.
[5] Rich Stearns, "Make a Difference for Generations", *World Vision Magazine*, 16, 3 (2013): 4.
[6] Wilson, 803, 819.
[7] "Be part of the fight to save lives in Kenya", *Christian Aid News*, 60 (2013): 27.

about. This is because Christian Aid, in their attempt to save lives, only look to tackle the "*cultural traditions* surrounding childbirth and family planning", which are said to "act as a barrier to women and children getting the care they need".[1] Like with the missionaries before them, the reliance on Western governments leads to the ultimate failure of NGOs to meaningfully address the structural causes of poverty.

A CMS report from 1926 admits that the missionaries' provision of education actually benefits the white settler first and foremost: "most Europeans are anxious for schools on their farms", it explains, "as these mean more contented labourers".[2] In the same sense, northern NGOs primarily carry out projects in Africa that are in line with the foreign policies of their donors. Like the CMS, who admit to be working in the interests of the colonialists, NGOs too are guilty of "serving foreign masters".[3] For Belloni, the choice is clear: either NGOs accept "donors' money and priorities", and thus accept co-optation into a "system that allows Western governments to avoid addressing the structural political, economic and social realities at the root of humanitarian crises", or, NGOs choose to take an ethical stand, and risk losing their "market share" to another organisation that accepts institutional funding.[4] This brings to light a key paradox. Truly 'solving' poverty requires addressing its structural causes and confronting questions of power; however, NGOs, like their missionary predecessors, rely on the very existence of this poverty, and support from the powerful, for their own survival. Hence, when Christian Aid talk of "shifting the balance of power" as their key strategy,[5] this can be read as little more than rhetoric.

[1] Ibid. Emphasis mine.
[2] *Annual Report of the CMS, 1925-1926*, 30.
[3] Fowler, "Role of NGOs", 60.
[4] Belloni, 468-469.
[5] Christian Aid, *Annual Report, 2012/13*, 5.

CONCLUSION

Sally Matthews, reflecting on the challenge of providing 'alternatives to development', reminds us that "in Africa's diversity there is a rich variety of ways of understanding and being", upon which to construct a different understanding of development. She illustrates this through the example of communities in Senegal:

"Conventional development theorists presume that Person A will give what she has in excess to Person B with the expectation that Person B will in turn give what he has in excess in proportion to the value of what he received from Person A. However, some Senegalese communities assume something quite different: they assume that to give confers respectability on a person, and that Person A, who has in excess, will give without any expectation of a measurable and equivalent return, because the act of giving (rather than having) confers prestige".[1]

Similarly, Amutabi describes how, in his case study of NGOs in rural Kenya, many of those he interviewed "differed from NGOs in their definition of development". Specifically, "in many Kenyan societies, if one lives far much better than the rest, philanthropy takes the upper hand through providing for the extended family that gather around such individuals…People naturally do not always accumulate much more than their neighbours without sharing their fortunes".[2] In other words, there are other possibilities and values upon which to base development – ones which are markedly different to the system of capitalist exchange and its accompanying values of wealth accumulation, and which are, in fact, better suited to the people and communities affected.

[1] Sally Matthews, "Post-development theory and the question of alternatives: a view from Africa", *Third World Quarterly*, 25, 2 (2004): 381.
[2] Amutabi, xxxiv.

As this case study has made clear, NGOs, instead, adopt a dualistic discourse which is rooted in colonial thought, and which defines Africa in terms of its perceived difference from the West. This difference is presented as the cause of the country's 'underdevelopment'. In order to escape poverty, Kenyans thus need to be liberated from their own culture, through accepting Western values and practices. This historical perspective draws attention to how the CMS and the UMMS did much the same in the Kenya Colony and how, by doing so, they facilitated forms of colonial intervention and oppression. As such, it shines a light on how WVI and Christian Aid are implicated in a neocolonial project, as many critical scholars have contended. However, this dissertation has also outlined the ways in which they do help Kenyan communities and provide key services. Christian Aid, moreover, display a more political understanding of poverty in Kenya than do WVI, and they often challenge Western governments and their foreign policies. Nevertheless, due to their acceptance of Western institutional funding and their embeddedness in a capitalist system, much like their missionary predecessors, their transformative potential is blunted and they become easily co-opted into the role of implementers for neocolonial policy-makers. In this sense, the issue is as much structural as it is to do with NGOs' own choices.

Olawoore and Kamruzzaman highlight how, through establishing "a common understanding" of key principles and values, there exists the possibility of "an effective partnership" between northern NGOs and their local partners, in which local NGOs are "empowered" to "have more influence on the development agenda and processes".[1] In this respect, this historical perspective has underlined the necessity for northern NGOs to escape the colonial paradigm, and has pointed to ways in which this might be possible. For example, by searching for solutions in African societies, rather than the West, they would be taking a significant first step in correcting the wrongs committed by past missionary efforts. Doing so would involve the amplification of African voices, and a serious consideration of local solutions; consequently, this pursuit would represent a fruitful avenue for future research. Endorsing these solutions, however, will necessitate facing up to difficult existential questions: most

[1] Babatunde Olawoore and Palash Kamruzzaman, "NGOs, Partnership and Accountability – A Case Study of ActionAid and its Local NGO Partners in Nigeria", *Forum for Development Studies*, 46, 3 (2019): 451-452.

importantly, is their current organisational structure (and source of funding) compatible with a post-colonial dynamic?

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