

AFRICAN ECONOMICS, AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MISSION AND DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Africans believe that they are following an overriding principle, that of putting the welfare of the individual ahead of other considerations. They believe that if all individuals are treated with consideration and respect, then society in the long run will be a peaceful one where good people live in mutual dependence and solidarity ... This they believe is the only way society can achieve harmony for all. (Maranz 2001:122).

1. Introduction

Vigorous debates on ‘development’ engaged in by many Western Christians and Christian organisations demonstrate a desire to express fellowship and love to fellow believers in ‘poor’ parts of the world such as Africa. The debates have culminated in action in the form of numerous development projects, aid and intervention from the West. This essay seeks to contribute to the debates, by providing insights into economic practices that emerge from within Sub-Saharan Africa.

Policies and ideologies underlying all kinds of development intervention twist, change and turn with time. Many practitioners who enter the field later leave frustrated and disappointed with the results that they obtain on the ground in Africa. A failed outcome is invariably less publicised than an optimistic launch. While it is recognised to be better to teach a man to fish than give him a fish, massive international resource transfers are currently the order of the day in both Christian and non-Christian organisations.¹ Meanwhile there is a voice in the background saying that ‘projects do not work’; certainly African economies do not seem to ‘take off’ as expected.

This essay takes an Africa centred view to make a penetrating re-examination of some of these issues. Western economists have been at the forefront of exporting their models for consumption in Africa. But how does economics work on the ground in Africa? How do African societies function economically outside of their interaction with Western communities? How do they adapt to Western interventions? Why do development projects so often not work? And then, how should Western Christians respond to the reality on the ground?

A penetrating linguistic analysis based on some of the latest research in language and translation forms a backdrop to this article. Once grasped, this will enable the reader to make decisive observations about traditional development

¹ Many organisations, including the British Evangelical Alliance (Evangelical Alliance 2007) are in open support of the Millennium Development Project, which is focused on resource transfer to achieve certain development targets.

approaches. This essay is written from one world to another; from 21st Century Africa, to contemporary Western society. It makes bold statements about differences in culture, because those differences need to be carefully considered in policy formation. It is rooted in personal experience of grass-roots Christian ministry. The author has spent his adult life researching African societies using indigenous languages from a rural African base, while engaged in leadership training ministry with indigenous churches.

2. An Account of African Economics by David Maranz

An enthusiastic missionary colleague introduced me to Maranz' book *African Friends and Money Matters* a few years ago. Its statements about economics in Africa rang strongly true to my own experience of (by then) 17 years living on the Continent. I put the book 'to the test' through in-depth study and wide discussion on it with African undergraduate Bible and Theology students at Kima International School of Theology (Kenya) in 2006 and 2007 (as part of teaching the course entitled 'Emerging Issues in Theology'). Listening to students was confirmation to my conviction that Maranz' observations are accurate. Gondwe (on reviewing Maranz' book) confirms this: "Maranz's observations are mostly on the mark when it comes to how Africans approach interpersonal relationships and finance" he says (Gondwe 2003:109).

The foundations for many observations in his later book were being explored in outline by Maranz in an earlier 1993 publication. This 1993 text about the Muslims of the Senegambia focuses on 'transcendent peace', with economics as a major sub-theme. Maranz describes the mechanisms that hinder social and economic advance in the Senegambia:

The fear of envy ... the related fear of witchcraft ... the requirement of sharing material goods, a strong hierarchical social organization, and the fear of social quarantine ... are some of these mechanisms, ... Together, they add up to a formidable impediment to an ethic of achieving an accumulation of wealth or a means of production through hard work and getting ahead economically. Senegambians have a great desire to get ahead, to be successful, to live comfortably and to have material plenty, but the means the culture legitimises for their realisation are spiritual rather than physical, that is, through personal effort (Maranz 1993:121).

While Maranz studies a Muslim society, he questions the practice of examining the functioning of religious traditions through consideration of formal doctrines (Maranz 1993:227). His approach, based on participant observation and drawing on 'worldview', reveals an expression of Islam that is deeply African. Maranz expands his 1993 discoveries related to economics considerably in his 2001 publication *African Friends and Money Matters*. While concentrated on Senegal, this text draws on material from throughout SSA (Sub-Saharan Africa) and finds many parallels across the subcontinent, pointing to a basic unity of African cultures, with which other scholars (such as Magesa (1997:26)) are in agreement.

Maranz finds Western and African economies to be incompatible (Maranz 2001:1).² He expounds on this incompatibility at length. Whereas ‘Westerners’ (Maranz considers this a sufficiently homogenous title for comparative purposes (2001:11)) seek macro solutions to their problems, Africans focus on micro-solutions (2001:5). While the “... culture of sharing and of solidarity ... reflects really fundamental and positive principles of African society” Maranz tells us “these qualities are also the source of some of its greatest problems” (2001:8). One outcome of these peculiar African principles of life is that while Westerners appear “to have ample resources that many Africans would like to have them share [they] ... lack most other qualifications for meaningful relationships” (Maranz 2001:9). Maranz identifies major differences between the West and Africa in the basic institution of friendship. In Africa, friendship and economic interdependence seem to be inseparable (Maranz 2001:65) whereas “.....the only way [an American] can know if a friend is true or not is to remove material considerations from their association” (2001:25). “The two systems mix about as well as oil and vinegar ... only with great and constant effort” says Maranz (2001:9).

While not discussing African ‘religious beliefs’ in detail in this 2001 book, Maranz makes clear reference to their impact on economics. People fear to “accumulate more good or property than their neighbours and kin” as jealousy “may lead to reprisals being carried out against them on an occult level” (Maranz 2001:111). Success in life, Maranz tells us, has “its origins in spiritual, esoteric (that is occult) power” and “the direct intervention of the transcendent in the affairs of an individual” (2001:135). The balancing of good and evil powers continues because, whereas many Africans “have a double culture and a large capacity to assimilate the customs and cultures of others ... they do so without disowning their African values” (Maranz 2001:164).

The presence of massive wealth originated in the West has resulted in many strategies for self-enrichment by Africans. This has made it “virtually impossible for the African as well as the Westerner to tell who is needy and who pretends to be” (Maranz 2001:21). African people’s willingness to pretend aggravates difficulties already faced by many researchers in Africa: that while “Africans readily share space and things [they are] possessive of knowledge ...” (Maranz 2001:30)³.

Africans, according to Maranz, believe fundamentally (even tenaciously) in the importance of sharing what they have (2001:13-62). Thus “... it follows that the notion of ‘surplus’, cannot be separated from that of ‘selfishness’” (Maranz 2001:19). Those with a ‘surplus’ are considered to be ‘selfish egoists ... insensitive to the needs of others’ (Maranz 2001:37). African leaders are “expected to ... distribute resources ... for their followers when they have needs” (2001:132). This emphasis on sharing is rooted in a utopian ideal (Maranz 1993:215). Maranz adds that:

² “If African people attempted rigorously to follow Western financial principles, their societies would collapse economically. ... if Westerners attempted to follow African financial principles, their economies could not achieve what they are primarily designed to accomplish” (Maranz 2001:1).

³ That is, to use language as a tool for achieving a particular aim, rather than as an expression of ‘truth’. See below.

Africans believe that they are following an overriding principle, that of putting the welfare of the individual ahead of other considerations. They believe that if all individuals are treated with consideration and respect, then society in the long run will be a peaceful one where good people live in mutual dependence and solidarity ... This they believe is the only way society can achieve harmony for all (Maranz 2001:122).

Friendships in Africa are “built and maintained with gifts” (Maranz 2001:72). As a result, Westerners who are ready to make donations attract a lot of African friends. But the problem is that they “lack most other qualifications for meaningful relationships” (Maranz 2001:9) (as already cited above). Despite being able to enter the friendship network on account of contributed funds “the Westerner comes across as insensitive, callous, indifferent to how others think and feel, and as having a great lack of human insensitivity and tact” (Maranz 2001:188/189). This friendship that a Westerner purchases is as a result unlikely to be a deep or close one.

Maranz finds accountability for funds, in the Western sense, to be an unwelcome stranger in Africa. Financial irregularities hence are rarely investigated (see example in Maranz 2001:112). “It is practically an impossibility for Westerners to understand that Africans might lose face if required to provide careful accounting” he adds (Maranz 2001:102).

All of the above have major implications for socio-economic development – which Maranz considers in detail. Contrary to apparently widespread wisdom, Maranz tells us that “the economic problems in Africa are not primarily due to a lack of natural and human resources” (2001:123). Efforts at providing for this supposed lack backfire as “why do the work yourself when there are development agencies with more money than you will even see in a lifetime looking for places to give it away” (Maranz 2001:127, citing Muchena 1996:177)? In Africa, “the value of a development project is not to be measured by its long term success” but by the degree to which it provides short-term funds in the pocket (Maranz 2001:151). Enormous current foreign-dependence in much of Africa raises the concern that “if people do not learn to help themselves with things they can do themselves, their development will be limited in the long term” (Maranz 2001:104). Financial aid can be seriously debilitating. The activities of the donor-oriented development ‘industry’ are inimical to development.

I have quoted Maranz extensively. I am extremely grateful to him for having written as he has. I was trying to pluck up the courage to write much the same book myself when I came across his (Maranz 2001). I find Maranz almost 100% accurate.

3. Economics in Theory and Practice

It is widely considered to be in people’s long term economic interests to raise their level of ‘wanting’ so as to stimulate demand. The advocates of this economic approach have not lost hope. They gain sufficient support for it from international donors who remain in the forefront when it comes to the planning of relationships between poor and wealthy countries. Their arguments deal with the macro-level. The case they make appears to be clear. Adding to their favour amongst the major wealthy

international players of today – is that they appear to be ‘religiously neutral’. This is important because today’s international ‘religion’, known in English as secularism, is supposedly independent of any divine beings, or teachings / guidelines emanating from them.⁴

Sometimes desperation by those frustrated by their inability to remedy what they see as gross economic injustices on an international scale perpetuate the transcendence of the above approach. That is, people see no alternative to massive wealth transfers for the resolution of ‘poverty’. Their thinking has, it seems, been so narrowed through their particular culture, upbringing, worldview and especially fundamental denial of the spiritual nature of humanity – that they simply see no alternative basis for relationship other than ‘donor’ and ‘recipient’. (“Yet the option of doing nothing is worse” than the dangers inherent in the provision of aid, says Wolf (2005:2). But who said we should do ‘nothing’?) Unfortunately, despite volumes of writings produced and much careful scholarship engaged in, their ‘solution’ has one simple problem; it does not work.

I refer my reader to the debate raging between proponents of the Millennium Development Project, and its critics. Jeffrey Sachs’s famous book *The End of Poverty* sets out the thinking that has come to underlie the Millennium Development Project. “The vast barriers to development in Africa are not in the mind, but in the soils, the mosquitoes, the vast distances over difficult terrain, the unsteady rainfall” shares Sachs (2005). William Easterly, known as Sach’s great critic, points out that:

the idea of investing vast sums of money to close the poverty gap in Africa was tried in the 1950s and ’60s, and failed. ... Sachs’s book peddles an “administrative central plan” in which the UN secretary-general “would supervise and coordinate thousands of international civil servants and technocratic experts to solve the problems of every poor village and city slum everywhere” (the quotes from Easterly are cited by Rich (2007)).

Easterly advocates “measures designed to improve accountability and reduce corruption, and specific investments aimed at tackling one problem at a time (Rich 2007). Neither Sach’s nor Easterly take the trouble to explore theological aspects of ‘poverty’ and ‘underdevelopment’. The possibility that African people’s pantheistic or monistic beliefs may orient them to an other-than ‘Western-rational’ approach to the acquisition of material blessing does not seem to occur to them. Instead they seem to have absolute faith in the inconsequence of religious belief in relation to economics, and in the hegemony of materialism.

As with many world-religions, the failure to see one’s faith lived out in reality will not quickly change the faith itself.⁵ People believe, very often, despite and not because of evidence. Language is “the main instrument of man’s refusal to accept the world as it is” says Steiner (1998:228). It is the means by which “man has spoken himself free of total organic constraint” (Steiner1998:245). But yet there must come a

⁴ I argue in Harries (2007b) that it would be helpful for scholarly purposes to consider ‘secularism’ to be a ‘religion’.

⁵ In order to compare like with like, I here consider secularism with its materialist roots to be a ‘world religion’. (See esp. Harries 2006b.)

time of testing, a time of truth, a time to reject an old paradigm in favour of a new one, and I believe that this time has come. Before going onto this new paradigm however, I would like to explain in a little more detail just why the old paradigm of classical economics applied to Africa, is problematic, drawing particularly on David Maranz above. I would like to give a non-exhaustive description of frequently-overlooked considerations that challenge the application of classical economic paradigms cross-culturally.

4. Difficulties with the Classical Economist's Approach in Cross-Cultural Perspective

The problem that I am identifying does not lie with economic theory itself. A consideration of the functioning of society based on people's decisions and orientation to need fulfillment is probably as valid in Africa as it is elsewhere. Models such as that used by Sachs fall short as a result of their failure to account for extant religious and cultural complications. Carrying out one's analysis using English as interpreted in the West is sure to invite such failure because much of African life falls outside of the scope of Western English. I refer my readers elsewhere for detailed explanations of how linguistic misconceptions arise (Harries 2007c). The effective impossibility of inter-cultural communication means that economist's wisdom can be transformed as it travels from Europe to Africa. I will try and express some of the issues that arise in such a way that my readers will be able to follow me without reference to the above article (Harries 2007c), but strongly recommend that this also be read.

Many African countries receiving so called political 'independence' in the 1960's were left to run structures designed by Europeans for their own colonial purposes, within national boundaries set by Europeans without local consultation (Ayittey 1999:92 and 119-148). As little as a decade before the granting of independence, the notion that African people could lead-themselves through such a foreign system rooted in (to them) unknown thought forms, ideologies and cultures, was considered extremely unlikely. What changed was not its plausibility, but its political expediency. Steps were taken, 'impossibilities' were ignored, and on a wave of massive faith, self-governance in Africa began.⁶ Once initiated and implemented, major efforts continue to be made by the international community to sustain and perpetuate the new African nation states (aid – which is often ineffective (Ayittey 1999:275)). Notions of inter-racial equality have precluded the possibility of more realistic analyses of what is going on. (The identifying of cultural differences that are economically consequential between African and European peoples is easily

⁶ It is, for obvious reasons, not easy to find information on views expressed that were discouraging African independence in the mid-twentieth century. The Encyclopaedia Americana (published 1954) in the section on Africa under 'Africa's future' tells us that the 'African giant was waking up, and certain men, having acquired education in the West, were leading "anti-foreign campaigns" (Anon 1954:222). Far from predicting impending independence however, Kikuyu insurgency in Kenya is described as "murderous bands of natives ..." (Anon 1954a:223). The section on Kenya in the same encyclopaedia does not mention independence (Anon 1954b:373b). Ayittey tells of the difficulties faced by new African nation states as they took over from colonialists (1999:93).

considered to be racist.)⁷ National and international bodies continue to operate from this foundation of (unfortunately misguided) faith in cultural uniformity. Ignorance in areas of language – assuming that someone saying something as you say it means he understands it as you understand it regardless of who he is or where he has come from – has concealed the foundationless-ness of this faith (see Harries 2007c.) Almost the sole judge of ‘capability’, has come to be academia. Education is these days seen as ‘equalising’ in its effect. So, a European or an African (for example) with the same academic qualifications must be considered equally suitable for particular role(s). As if professors (who award degrees) are ‘gods’ and the academic system erases all cultural differences between one person and another.⁸

The ‘generous’ donating West screams the loudest against corruption, while operating the very system that perpetuates it.⁹ The supposedly ‘secular’ West leans heavily on providence in its donor driven efforts at resolving the world’s poverty (Harries. In press.). It is often not even realised that African recipients cannot possibly grasp what the ‘wealthy West’ is trying to do to ‘develop’ their countries, because unlike the donors, they do not have in depth experience of the functioning of ‘non-poor’ Western societies that are the models being implicitly used (Harries 2007c). The provision of ‘development aid’ is not a proven process in a stage of rational implementation, but is driven by faith in the necessity of global Westernisation. Unfortunately political and economic power are not easily separated. African presidents, themselves legitimized to a large degree by foreign powers, are given an impossible task to fulfill to avoid corruption. Even the language of governance is usually not theirs. (Most African countries are governed using languages rooted in European cultures.)

Pointing out the error of the current system may not be the same as providing a solution for it. African countries are in a dependency jam. But ignoring this predicament; stopping someone from crawling out of a slippery hole by beating his head, hardly seems to be the solution. The current system whereby the West controls what it wants to through its economic might and conveniently blames African leaders for its own failure to consider issues of language, culture, theology, and spirituality in its efforts at ‘developing’ the Third World, is unbecoming. Dismantling it, given the enormous dependence it, could also generate disaster. What is important, I suggest however, is to begin to put in place a more firmly grounded alternative. This is discussed in more detail in section 7 below on ‘vulnerable mission’.

⁷ This is just one instance of the ‘over-application’ of Christian teaching by ‘secularists’ who do not take the time to make a careful study of theology. The Christian teaching that all men are equal in worth, has been misconstrued as meaning that all men should be taken as equal in culture and capability, leading to the labeling as ‘heretical’ any suggestion that (for example) African people are less capable of ruling themselves on a European-designed system of governance, than would be the Europeans who devised it. This heresy is known by secularists as ‘racism’.

⁸ Education is widely considered to be a key to ‘development’, apparently forgetting that it must build on what is already there. That is, the original culture of a person is largely determinative of the form of true education, and not vice versa.

⁹ Large contributions of finance with little local ownership or accountability are generative of corruption.

I will mention in passing other reasons for the sheer impracticality of current ‘development’ efforts. Maranz points out that African people understand success as arising from the correct handling of mystical powers (2001:135). This principle is invariably applied by Africans in their efforts at understanding what the West is doing in Africa. One can almost say (to Westerners reading this article) – for ‘economics’ in Africa read ‘mysticism’ – then see what sense can be made of Western textbooks? In Africa ‘things’ are not merely ‘things’ (Davis 2000:254. See also Harries 2007a:322.) – even when subject to trade and Western ideals such as ‘free market’. Rather, things have power – way beyond any financial valuation given to them. Western discourses are by African societies invariably understood through their own interpretational screen, which the West considers to be ‘superstition’ (Omari 1993, and see also Harries 2007d).¹⁰

I am often amazed by Westerners’ shock at finding that African people ‘tell lies’. They seem to have forgotten that Kant (through the influence of the Bible) was needed to convince Westerners that lying is fundamentally unhelpful.¹¹ African people never had their Kant, or of course the Bible until very recently. The fact is that people use languages differently. Merely learning English does not instantly erase such differences. Instead English comes to be used according to the rules of usage of other languages. (It is more important not to offend than it is to keep to some barely perceived notion of ‘objective truth’ in various cultures around the world. So, by way of example that I suggest would also apply to Africa, Guodong and Jing found that Chinese students are more apt to agree with someone with whom they have a greater social distance (2005:np). In other words, to ‘please’ becomes more important than to speak the ‘truth’ especially when social distance grows.) Condemning people for what is ‘normal life’ in their community hardly seems right, but neither does ‘believing them’ according to particular Western notions of truth when these are not the basis of what is being said.

5. The Economics of Jesus.

I will now take a cursory glance at ‘the economics of Jesus’. I hope that this will provide insights into an alternative ‘economic model’, and enlighten Westerners as to how Jesus’ life and teachings can appear to someone not studying him through Western pre-suppositional spectacles. Reading their Bible in their language Jesus, to Africans, seems to be very African. Contrary to the impression given by the Western church that he is a Euro-American (see Stinton (2004) for the identity of Jesus in Africa).

While Jesus was concerned for people’s well being – he never once healed anyone using modern Western procedures, equipment or medicines. He worked through miracles (σημειον / δυναμις)..(quotes in Greek are from Marshall (1993)) and not scientific procedures proved through double-blind trials. No-where does Jesus

¹⁰ Omari (1993) explains how *ushirikina*, that could be translated into English as superstition or witchcraft, penetrates all areas of life in Tanzania.

¹¹ Kant advocated that people should “Always act in such a way that you can also claim that the maxim of your action should become a universal law” (Ellington 1981:np).

promote free-market economics in a neo-classical way. Economic transactions were in his day rooted in the Temple (Stevens 2006).

We have no record in the New Testament of Christ's making a 'donation' to the poor. Rather, Jesus' words seem to run contrary to such 'donations'. "... that's who Jesus was. He did not reach down to the poor; he was poor – a subtle difference overlooked for millennia" shares Thomas (2004:2). He considered the widows mite to have been of more value than the rich man's generosity – not very good economic thinking (Luke 21:2-4). He did not object to having expensive ointment (μυρον) poured to 'waste' on his body when it could have been sold to assist the poor (John 12:3-8). He told his disciples that 'the poor will always be with you' when they drew his attention to this issue (John 12:8). Jesus was very reluctant to use food or finance to induce people to 'join his church' (John 6).

I do not on the basis of the above paragraphs conclude that 'therefore provision of international development aid is wrong'. I have not touched on Biblical teachings other than those of Jesus – such as Paul's famous 'collection for Jerusalem' that is often, I believe inappropriately, used to justify development aid (see Nickle 1966:127). Jesus' context was very different from that in the world today – with all that is nowadays enabled by technology and expected in life especially by Westerners. Yet I feel I am justified in saying that claims that international aid is foundationally Christian may be misguided. (See also Harries 2006a). Certainly – there is much more to Christianity than aid, and 'aid' does not do justice to Christianity's depth, breadth or profundity. Confining its witness to the poor to financial donations, suggests to me that the Western church has 'lost the plot'. It is selling the Gospel short. The work of the Gospel requires (vulnerable) people, and not only finance and technology.

6. What is love?

Jesus is reported as saying: "A new command I give you: Love one another ..." (John 13:34a (NIV)). The nature of the love that Christians are to have for one another is revealed by the second half of this verse: "... as I have loved you, so you must love one another" (John 13:34b (NIV)). So then – how has Jesus loved us? Jesus' love did not follow the contours of economic theory. It could be argued that this was because economic theory had in his day yet to be invented. Had it been known, perhaps Jesus would have been its strongest supporter – and he would have been there in World Bank council gatherings or alongside Jeffrey Sachs in Millennium development board meetings planning the end of global poverty in 2015? To me though – I doubt it. That seems to be too great a stretch of Biblical hermeneutics!

Jesus' love is not intended to ease people's lives yet leave them squirming in the swamp of ultimate despair on approaching death.¹² His love is intended to reveal himself to people. His love talks of God, the God who created mankind and has a plan for him. It is a love expressed in holiness, joy and peace. It is a love that says "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33 (KJV)) and not – "you can't preach to a man with an empty stomach" (which seems to be the popular wisdom of Christian Mission from the West to the rest today).

¹² Hope in Christ is for eternity.

It should be understood that the issue at stake for Christians is *not* whether to love. Love is clearly a command of Christ. But that command leaves a question, I suggest, which is *how to love?* Much fund-raising and many development agencies these days ignore this distinction. Professional development workers want people to assume that because they are actively addressing a problem they must be doing good and the solution they offer must be the best. The solution that gives the greatest return to charitable hearts in the West is, it appears, the simple one that is physical and plainly visible. Basically – ‘do it for people’, or pay people to do what they should be doing anyway.

Maranz expounds on ‘African economics’ in some detail. (See above.) Some attempts to refute him come from people who do not like to accept difference, and assume ‘different’ to be ‘inferior’, without considering that different procedures have different aims. African people seek to maximize social harmony, with the dead as well as the living, not to maximize economic living standards (Mbiti 1969:15). Amongst the striking features of African economic life is the powerful ethic of economic equality which says that he who has *must* give to he who has not and that this must continue until the giver has less than the original receiver (Maranz 2001:152). Only then can the flow of giving begin to reverse. Careful thought should reveal that this could result in donating to Africa by the West continuing to perpetuity. The African system is underwritten by the African ancestors. Changing it requires challenging their authority. This is ‘religious change’. This should have top priority, and this is the traditional domain of Mission.

The West carefully interprets Jesus’ words to fit their own context (in the process of ‘biblical hermeneutics’). Now, we need as much care in interpreting the New Testament for the African context. There is no particular reason why the interpretation we happen to use in ‘the West’ is also the right one for Africa. There is every reason to believe that it is not. To allow an African interpretation to develop really requires the use of an African language in scholarship. It is very difficult to prevent the dominance of Western theology if the language in use is Western.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son ...” (John 3:16a (NIV)). The ultimate act of love on God’s part was that his son not only came to the world, but also died for the world. That is, God’s great act of love was expressed in Jesus’ death. Not in all that he could have achieved had he been alive. Imagine what Jesus might have done had he lived for another ten years. Presumably God had a reason for Jesus’ dying as early as he did. At least in part I suggest that this may have been for the very good down-to-earth reason that people had to learn to do for themselves.

Christ’s mission on earth did not have the intention of solving all the world’s problems. Or else we would have to call it a failure. He came, rather, to give an example to follow and to show God’s love. The way he did so should be an education to us; by so openly speaking God’s truth as to be awarded the death sentence by his fellow countrymen! He initiated no development projects, built no hospitals and made no (as far as we know) donations to worthy causes. Many apparently ended up hating him (Mathew 27:22-23). Then he turned the world upside down

(οικουμενην αναστατωσαντες).(Acts 17:6). This is the example that Christians have been given to follow.

7. African Economics in Response to Western Aid

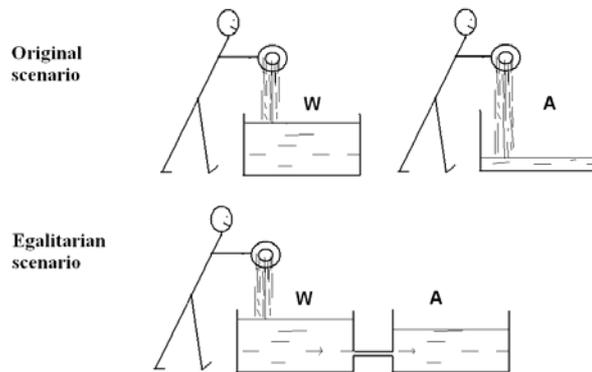
I now want to consider what happens as a result of a meeting of the Western economic system with the African one, the latter as described by Maranz and which I also experience first-hand on a daily basis as I live amongst the people of Western Kenya.¹³ In the diagrams below, water is taken as representing economic resources. Buckets can be used to add water, and every individual has a tank which is filled with water (i.e. economic resources) to various levels. Someone with a full tank has many accessible resources. Someone whose water level is low – has few visible resources at hand. I understand Foster as being correct in saying that in ‘traditional societies’ local resources are considered to be limited, so any addition of resources to an individual must be considered as someone else’s loss, unless it comes from outside of the system – i.e. the West (1973).

Maranz makes it clear that African people are generally careful not to display a lot of wealth, and especially not to accumulate large stocks of household items such as food. This is for various reasons, including so as to avoid being bewitched by those who become jealous of what they have. Also because people will ask to borrow if they see a surplus, and it is very hard in the African context to refuse such borrowers. Thus the position before the coming of the Westerner is represented by the ‘original scenario’ in Fig. 1. (W is the Westerner, and A the African.) I take it that there is nothing inherently either ‘wrong’ or ‘evil’ with someone’s choice to run their household in the African way (of keeping few resources at hand). Ways to overcome it, if it were to be considered in any way ‘wrong’ it would seem ought to include discouraging jealousy and countering witchcraft. These are areas where Christian teaching is considered effective.

While the upper part of Fig 1. shows the situation of independent African and European economies, the scenario that often arises from Western intervention is illustrated by the lower part. Valuing economic equality, the Westerner (W) provides a means of sharing of wealth with the African. Now the African person finds that he has more than enough wealth even before having made any personal efforts to acquire such. (I refer to the African person as ‘he’ as I am here considering the position of the head of a household. No gender bias is otherwise implied.) Hence he will be economically idle. But, while idle he is also concerned that others will be jealous of him and may bewitch him because of his wealth. (Space prevents me from giving all the detail pertaining to this scenario.) Hence he is very likely to be worried.

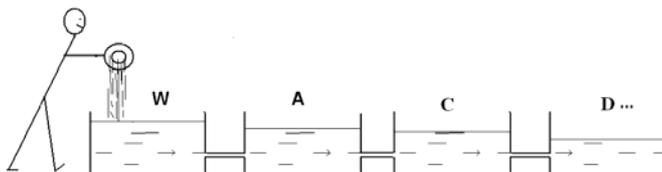
¹³ I live in a Luo village in a house originally built by a Luo man for himself and his wives. For five days weekly I am socially and economically a part of this African community. All household activities occur in the local language, Dholuo. My other main occupation in the five days weekly when I am in the village, is Bible teaching, using the African languages Dholuo and Kiswahili.

Fig. 1. Before and after Scenario as Westerners Share their Wealth with African People



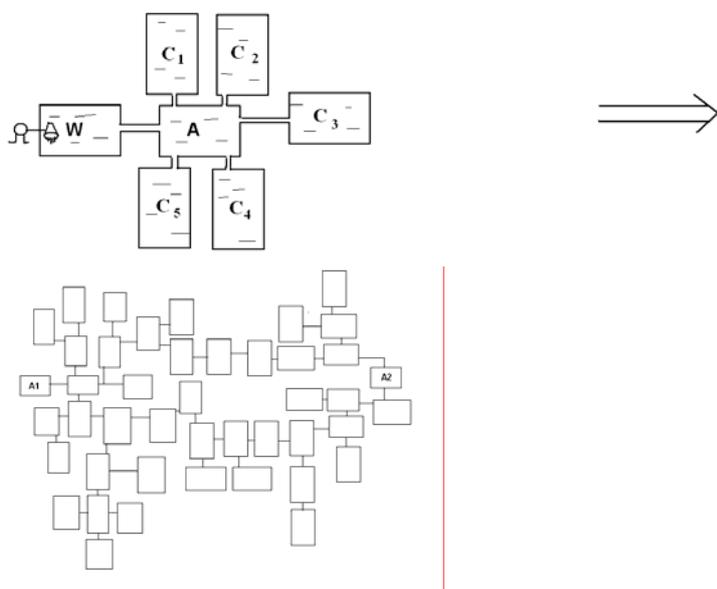
One action that the African beneficiary of Western benevolence will certainly quickly take is to share what they have with their wider community – especially extended family. Hence a Westerner is never supplying just one person. More and more people will be added, here represented by C and D, as long as the supply continues to flow, illustrated in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. The West has such an Abundance of Resources, that they can Supply Many People



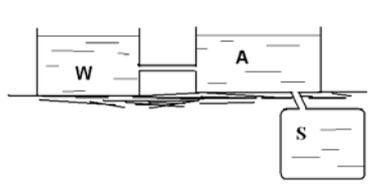
Thus dependency networks arise, as illustrated in Fig. 3. More than one donor may be available to a community, so that people have more than one option as to the source of their livelihood. If one dries up, another will be sought, and so on.

Fig 3. Dependency Networks Begin to Arise from Donor activity



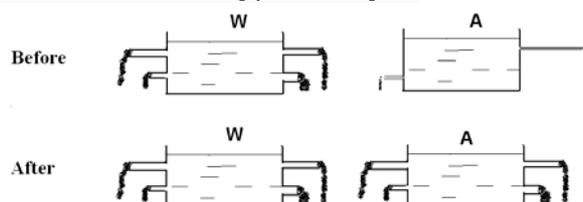
These illustrations are clearly simplifications. Fig 4. illustrates another possibility. Though not wanting to appear publicly as being wealthy, someone may find the means to keep some of their wealth out of sight (see Maranz 2001:138) as illustrated here by A's 'underground water tank' S.

Fig. 4. Addition of Storage Tank out of View



Another implication of this kind of economic circumstance is illustrated by Fig. 5. (below). W represents the Westerner, and A the African. It is well known that Westerners habitually consume many resources in normal day to day life, as illustrated by the large out-flow pipes of W. Before 'Westernisation' the African got by using very few resources (Before 'A'). This means that few outside resources could go a long way. The 'after' scenario however illustrates how these days African people are being encouraged to follow Western consumer's habits. This means that resources that were at one time sufficient to bring many African people to a state of contentment will constantly need to be boosted. That is – there is an ever-increasing need in Africa for more and more outside resources.

Fig. 5. A Diagram to Illustrate how Needs Increase as African People become Habituated to Western-type Lifestyles



Further realities of the African situation are illustrated by Fig. 6. below. In many African communities, women do most of the manual work. Men are otherwise occupied – particularly in ensuring that mystical powers (Maranz often refers to these as 'occult powers') are in their favour. Unlike water, firewood and so on, the favour of these mystical powers does not come through direct economic activity. Instead, mystical powers are fluid and spiritual in nature. They come in amazing ways¹⁴ when someone succeeds in currying favour with God or 'the gods'. International aid is more akin to these powers than to the routine rewards of hard labour; it can come to those who are good at talking. Hence the provision of international aid tends to provide a boost to occult beliefs, and European people in Africa considered to be 'gods'. Mystical powers are considered to be 'fluid' in nature, so they can increase or

¹⁴ This is akin to the Biblical term 'miracle'.

decrease in someone or can “burst through” (Evans-Pritchard 1976:2, Tempels 1959:100).

Fig. 6. Distribution of Labour, and Prosperity Arising from Mystical (Occult) Powers



8. Vulnerable Mission as the Way Forward

A practical question that now arises is, how does one avoid the creation of dependency and identification of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, with occult powers as shown above? How can we aptly follow the example of Jesus? What would Jesus have us do?

Christ used the language of the people he was reaching in his ministry.¹⁵ He did not subsidise his ministry efforts with external funds. Instead he became dependent on the people to whom he ministered – such as the women mentioned in Matthew 27:55. These are the two key tenets of Vulnerable Mission that I propose are appropriate for inter-cultural relationships today: use the language of the people you are reaching, and do not subsidise your ministry with foreign funds. A Westerner operating in Africa on the basis of Vulnerable Mission is, I suggest, imitating Christ.

Intercultural-communication is most effectively enabled through communication about God. This is because God is universal to all cultures and all peoples, as the creator of the whole world, whereas classical economics is a creation of a particular people of a particular culture and age. This is not to say that African people should not learn economics or could not benefit from a knowledge of what the West knows about economics or other disciplines. Rather, that the place to begin is God, and then other avenues will be opened up as African people seek to translate aspects of Western ways of life into their own languages and contexts.

Seeking to communicate about God using foreign money and foreign languages, is seeking to communicate God through a foreign platform – be it economic or linguistic. It is comparable to someone’s explaining the characteristics of one city by comparison with another unknown one. For example, if you wanted to know what Lusaka is like, I could say it has only half the land area of Washington DC but twice the population and has less roads and more rainfall. This will only be helpful to you if you are already familiar with Washington. Even if I do not mention the basis for comparison, and I say it is a small city – a comparison is implied. The appropriate comparison will be with that with which the person concerned is already familiar. But then – what if they are *not* familiar with what you are familiar?

Space precludes the possibility of detailed explanations of all justifications for Vulnerable Mission. Instead I will refer to other articles (see [¹⁵ He used either Greek or Aramaic/Hebrew, which he would have learned locally.](http://www.jim-</p>
</div>
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mission.org.uk/articles/index.html). The level of understanding that can be acquired of a foreign people without first learning their language is too low for the purposes of engaging in Christian mission work (Harries 2007e). Language can only be understood in a cultural context. Two people using the same 'language' but from the basis of different cultures (for example American English as against Zambian English) will not be able fully to understand one another (Harries 2007c).

It is extremely difficult to use someone else's language in discussing one's own situation – especially if the owners of the language may be 'overhearing' (see Harries 2007c)! What one engages in instead, is an explanation of one's culture to the foreigner to try to get him/her to a point of understanding. Hence African theological commentaries written in English are not 'African theology' in the true sense. The latter must happen in African languages. They are rather explanations aimed at raising the level of understanding of African ways to native English speakers. Or they are debates on Western theology, in which Africans choose to share (Harries 2007f).

A missionary who operates in the language of the people being reached will be enabled, if not obliged, to learn a great deal about the culture of the people in the process. Knowing language and culture enables him/her to begin to consider issues from the perspective of the people. It is of course coming from this perspective of the people that enables good use of insights to be made. By thus engaging from people's own thinking base, a missionary will be challenging and stretching their traditional view. (Failure to do this is to bring new knowledge with few connections to the existing context.) This stretching of traditional worldviews and language usages results in change that takes deep root in a community. It encourages the development of local thinking capacity, and not only the imitation of foreign forms.

Large amounts of expendable resources being in the hands of people with relatively little understanding of local conditions is bound to be disruptive. A foreign missionary will have difficulty distinguishing the people genuinely interested in his/her message, from those primarily concerned with financial gain. Finance entering the local economy that originates in the subject of a foreigner will be extremely liable to jealousies, dispute, contest, misappropriation and corruption. These can be very disruptive of important pre-existing authority structures, and can easily put real authority in the hands of charlatans. This problem is so pervasive, so destructive and so inevitable that it is advisable for a missionary or other foreign worker to leave the task of being 'donor' as far as possible to someone else.

A missionary operating on the basis of poverty, on the other hand, is not an obvious threat to existing political players, so will not arouse their opposition. 'Poverty' that leads to dependence on local people will enable a drawing near to a community, with all the learning possibilities that this opens up. This poverty will prevent the acquisition of 'hangers-on' who are more interested in money than in ministry. It will prompt local people to offer assistance when they see needs, thus to draw close to the missionary. It will free them to speak openly without fearing that they may be revealing information that will get them in trouble with others – for example that may say something that will result in a cut in the supply of funds. Finally and perhaps most importantly of all, it will force the foreign missionary to operate using only local resources, which means s/he will work in a way that can be imitated by local people. Thus it will totally avoid the issue illustrated in Figures 1 to 6 above.

People will learn to accumulate more resources as their faith in God enables them to overcome their fear of witchcraft.

9. Conclusion

A radically non-Western perspective on economics rooted in interpersonal relationships is here outlined. David Maranz' research that resulted in his book *'African Friends and Money Matters'* provides a theoretical platform from which further detailed economic analyses are carried out. Economic relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa are revealed by Maranz to be rooted in a way of life in which sharing from he who has more to he who has less is mandatory. A consideration of the implications of this utopian ethic forms the backbone to this article.

Attempts at informing the African scene using classical economic models developed in Europe are found to be insufficiently researched, especially through careful linguistic analysis. While foreign donations help to bring about a rise in demand for goods and services, such can be understood by African people as being exotic and unfamiliar (Foster 1973). This leads to increased dependence on the foreign and not the development of indigenous productive capacity. The 'economics of Jesus' based in his teaching on 'love' are offered as an alternative foundation. This is found to provide a well-trying and tested alternative to 'modern' models of economic change, and is advocated as the way forward for Christian mission to promote beneficial holistic grassroots social and cultural changes in African communities. Vulnerable mission, using the language of people being reached without access to outside resources for 'projects', is advocated as the way forward.

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