A Foray into (Study of?) African Political Theology by Siphiwe I. Dube

Introduction: What is it then?

The idea of a specific configuration called an “African Political Theology” (henceforth APT) raises a number of interrelated questions centred on definition (nomenclature), tradition (relationships), and development (sustainability). First, how do we define APT – are the definitions originary or expanded from others, and what are the political implications of speaking of a singular APT in a context of religious diversity such as the African continent? As Chukwudi Eze (2008) puts it, “With few exceptions, today’s Africa is remarkable for the number and diversity of religions that peacefully coexist on the continent” (p. 169). Consequently, taking such diversity seriously raises an important question of how does one deal with it in conceptualising a notion of an APT. That is, should we already start from the position of plurality and speak of African Political Theologies? If so, how do we address aspects of establishing or tracing a tradition with heft in similar ways that the western concept of Political Theology seems to have been able to, or is that even desirable, important, and necessary? Given that the western canon of Political Theology, whether traced from “discussions in political theory around the work of Carl Schmitt” or “discussions in Christian theology around the work of Jurgen Moltmann, Johann Baptist Metz, and Dorothee Solle” (Lloyd and True 2017, p. 539) reflects “a specific notion of Western history and hence Christendom” (Assmann qtd. in deVries 2006, pg. 28), how is APT to be placed in relation to this canon? Is it as a reaction to the western canon; as a subset of the western canon that has finally found its own plurality in a globalised context; as an offshoot that concerns itself with different questions; or as a subservient discourse that continues to bolster the problematic epistemological stance of African knowledge systems with respect to western knowledge systems?

As a tradition (whether constructed in adversarial terms, in relational terms, or off-shoot terms to the western tradition of Political Theology), ATP and its attendant relationships poses interesting theoretical and practical questions. In particular, the question of what is the task of APT is important in this regard. Related to queries of tradition are questions about the value of developing a notion of an APT. Is the development process a corrective one that tries to right something; is it an entrepreneurial one that tries to disturb the market of ideas on Political Theology; is it even sustainable given the plurality of notions of Political Theologies even within the continent itself; or is the developmental goal of APT encompassed by these multiple concerns and aims? In other words is APT merely descriptive or also normative and; from where do the descriptors and norms of valuation come?

A quick glance at the literature on the topic makes it clear that a large proportion of those concerned with any form of APT are primarily Christian theologians and mostly from the Roman Catholic tradition. This is a point attested to by a number of scholars working on and in APT. For example, acknowledging the various religious actors in successful faith-based diplomatic peace work in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Mozambiquan Civil War...
(1975-1990), and “Rhodesia Guerrilla Campaign” (1965-1979), Richard Benda (2012) highlights in great detail the role that the Catholic Church in particular, and draws his theoretical formulation of APT as grounded in everyday experiences from Jean-Marc Ela’s critique of religious discourse pronounced from on high (pgs. 6-9) (An ordained Catholic priest and sociologist, Jean Marc Ela was a vocal critic of both the Catholic Church in Cameroon and the Biya regime which forced him into exile in 1995). Furthermore, in his article on what he refers to as sources of social and political theology in Africa, Chukwudi Eze (2008) emphasizes the Catholic accent of his political theology. He notes that, “Although the books I have isolated for a closer reading are by Christian theologians, and the principal authors are priests of the Roman Catholic Church, it is obvious that the issues they discuss, and certainly the social ramifications, transcend this one denomination and are probably relevant to the African experiences of other religions as well” (p. 170). In a very direct way, Eze’s observation points to the tension of the religious pluralism tradition of Africa defined above.

Moreover, in writing about the life of the Cameroonian Archbishop Cardinal Tumi, Elias Bongmba (2016) notes that, “Political theology, which has come a long way in Cameroon, has been championed to a large extent by Catholic clergy and theologians. For example, Jean Marc Ela has written about the failure of the state and the massive suffering faced by citizens in the postcolony” (p. 284). In addition, in defense of some of his arguments in The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa (2011), Catholic theologian Emmanuel Katongole also draws on the work of Ela, alongside stories of Bishop Paride Taban of the Sudan, Angelina Atyam of Uganda, and Mary Barankiste of Burundi to show how a key aspect of APT is to dispel the hold of the nation-state in APT (a point I will return to later). The main point is that much of Katongole’s texture of what drives APT is drawn from Catholic Church experiences, whether institutional or individual. To a large extent, then, it seems that the type of APT addressed in much of the literature on the topic is largely driven by Catholic Church centred theology and the particular way in which this church understands and addresses the relationship between religion and politics.

However, according to Max Stackhouse (2004), this Catholic influence on Political Theology is not only observable in African context, but has longer historical roots in European Christian contexts as well. In this article, in which Stackhouse tries to delineate the difference between Civil Religion, Public Theology, and Political Theology, he argues that the tradition of examining the relationship between religion and politics that arose in Europe after WWII called Political Theology “has its deepest philosophical roots in Aristotle who had influenced all higher education in Catholic and Anglican lands since St. Thomas, and in Lutheran ones since Melanchthon...The new wave of political theology advanced on the Continent was represented by the reformist and overtly democratic political theologies of Catholic Johannes Metz and Reformed Jurgen Moltman” (pgs. 281-282). A key theme in this form of Political Theology is the Erastian idea that the state has supremacy over the church – here one can see the basis of Schmitt’s own foundational claim that significant concepts of modern state theory are secularized theological
concepts.¹ All this to say that the relationship between Catholic theology and Political Theology is a significant one in the context of reimagining the history of Catholicism and its relationship to “the secular state”, and there is much research possible in this area for the African context in particular.

The Catholic influence does provide a useful frame of reference for thinking about how the Schmittian paradigm which frames much of Political Theology is about negotiating the tension between God and Caesar – a perennial problem of thinking about authority and legitimacy in Christianity in general. As such, even in contexts where religion posits itself against the state, it not to decentre the state but to claim that the state is not fulfilling its moral obligation as a representative of the sovereignty of God on earth. There is a lot more else that can be said about this, but my interest lies in primarily demonstrating how the Catholic accent on APT also has a parallel strand in western Political Theology, thus posing an interesting question for APT, especially in a context where, as Katongole argues, “the most decisive critique of the nation state politics in Africa is not its failure to provide even basic services such as water, health care, infrastructure and security – though this shortcoming is telling in itself. The real issue is not so much what the state has failed to do for African men and women, but what it is doing to them...” (p. 83). The question is: what kind of relationship to the state is possible for APT, especially if the accent is placed on the notion of state failure? Put another way, can APT (afford to) ignore the state as a subject/object of analysis?

**APT and the Centrality of the State in Africa**

The centrality of the state in Political Theology in general is undergirded by the Schmittian view of the political, wherein the theological notion of God is transferred onto the political sovereign, which for Schmitt is the modern state. In the European context within which this reading of the state as the fulfillment of the Enlightenment dream of the separation of the rational state from dogmatic religion, the result has been an emphasis on a negative theology. William Cavanaugh (2002) has observed, for example, how in Europe the prevalent assumption has been that any directly politicized theology is, as a result of the myth of separation of state and church, is read as “inherently dangerous and violent” and that the modern state, supposedly, “has done a tremendous service for peace in separating power from Religion” (p. 5). The emergence of the post-colonial African state is different precisely because of the significant contribution played by Christian Churches in the rise of postcolonial Africa. In that sense any form of APT cannot ignore the state as its subject/object of analysis. The focus centres on the question of how APT engages with the category of the state, especially given the complex relationship of post-colonial state formation and religion in Africa.

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¹All significant concepts of the modern theory of state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development—in which they were transformed from theology to the theory of state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of the concepts” - Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985 [1934]), 36.
According to Richard Benda, the close association between the postcolonial state in Africa and Christian churches resulted in a different form of negative political theology on the continent. Benda writes, “A ‘negative’ political theology issued from this close kinship between State and Church. This political theology was mainly based on a political reading of two key biblical texts: Romans 13:1-7 and 1Peter 2:17-20. These passages which form the spine of traditional Christian political theology, at least within African Roman Catholicism, derive all political power from God and call for unchallenged or absolute submission and obedience to the state” (p. 5). As a result, Benda continues,

This petrine and pauline conception of power, a “nulla potestas nisi a Deo” [all power comes through God], has profoundly marked the political and intellectual thought of the African Church. Moreover, it has had many heavy consequences on African political theology. First of all, echoing Schmitt’s political theology, the Church fulfilled the function of legitimating and underwriting political power. Besides, by means of a mutual assimilation of elites, more often within the ruling political party and under the authority of the President; the church could neither avoid being instrumentalized nor losing its role as an institution of social critique. (p. 5)

That is, what gets transposed onto the African context in terms of Political Theology is the problem of reading the transcendent in absolute terms (whether the transcendent is the a deity or the secular state) in a context where religion “was never relegated, even superficially, to a space outside politics and current events, or to benign places of private worship” (Smith 2012, p. 9). In other words, religion in Africa has always been very much public and, therefore, political. Even in the context of Europe, it is arguable, as Assmann argues that, “the further one goes back in time the more difficult it becomes to distinguish between religious and political institutions” (qtd. in de Vries 2006, p. 28). The point, however, is that since for APT, the starting point is not separation, but the double-consciousness of postcolonial African state formation with respect to religion, this has resulted in an adoption of a particularly problematic tension with regards to the postcolonial African state.

In fact, Katongole (2011) sees in the insistence on a modern-state approach in Africa a limitation rather than enablement. In his view, what Christianity can contribute in Africa “is not in terms of advocacy for nation-state modalities, but instead fresh visions of what Africa is and can be” (p. 50). Specifically, in responding to Elias Bongmba’s (2014) critique of his views, Katongole argues that the adoption of a Lockean (social contract) and Hobbesean (sovereignty of the prince) conception of the relationship between religion and politics which animates much of western political theory (and transplanted onto the African context), has meant an assumption of an independent realm of politics, which ‘does not need a religious sanction,’ insofar as it stands over and above any religious considerations, but which ‘people of different faith traditions can make claim to.’ It is this view of politics—which regards the church’s role in non-political terms, and thus turns it into merely a ‘faith based’ organization (whose proper competence lies in the
pastoral, moral and spiritual realm)—that I call into question in *The Sacrifice of Africa*. In doing so, I seek to open up the so-called ‘political sovereignty’ of nation-state modernity in Africa to radical critique and re-invention, while at the same time making obvious the essential political nature of Christian faith. In the end what I am calling for is a more dynamic and fluid relation between politics and Christian faith than is assumed within modern political theory. (Katongole 2014, pg. 425)

Put another way, what Katongole perceives as part of the task of APT is the questioning of what Benda (2012) refers to as State Soteriology, wherein “in the footsteps of Locke and Hobbes, Schmitt’s political theology [has] suggested that the political is the total” (p. 10). Moreover, the fluidity of which Katongole speaks certainly privileges the realm of religion as essentially political and not just functionally so.

For Benda, “If, in modern times, religion has increasingly been seen in the West as a theological set of issues rather than a profoundly political influence; the political importance of religion reverberates with strength in Third World countries, particularly in Africa” (2012, p. 7). While betraying a rather functionalist view of religion due a focus on viewing APT through a lens of faith-based diplomacy, Benda’s observation above, nonetheless, highlights the ways in which in the African context the perception of “the State as the arch of salvation” (p. 10) is challenged by the encouragement to not discard the religious in decision-making contexts, both private and public. That is to say, rather than jettison Christian theological concepts as tools with limited reach, APT thinks with and acts through the theological as political and not simply as constituted by it (in the Schmittian sociological sense), but as informing the varied possible notions of *the polis*. At least this is what both Benda and Katongole highlight in the ways in which they demonstrate how, for example, Christian values have been foundational to some of the responses to conflict situations on the continent.

Their arguments are not simply about how African Christians use their faith against a generalized necropolitics of the “instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (Mbembe 2003, p. 14). That view limits the analytical value of religions to “the roles they play as one among a variety of social or political movements or institutions” (Marshall 2009, p. 20). That is to say, taking religion as only representing responses to material crises, as Ruth Marshall further notes, limits it to being “considered as a medium for a message that is about something else, something nonreligious; the religious sphere is not interrogated as *such* for its political significance” (p. 18). Therefore, in decentring the state and focusing on what Bongmba (2016) refers to as “a socially located and conscious theology of justice” (p. 300) and where, as he further argues, “For many Africans, the issue is not, if God is back into the debate, rather God has always been part of the equation” (p. 301), APT can be said to centre religion in the everyday rather than see it as something that is a response tool/mechanism against an supposedly increasingly encroaching state (for an example of this kind of displacement role of religion argument see the

The significance of this decentring of the state is not to argue for its displacement, but, in an inversion of the Schmittian paradigm, to reconfigure sovereignty through the centrality of the religious in African life and thought. As Bongmba (2014) puts it, “A political theology in the African context still needs to pay attention to institutions and its actors as a way of shifting and expanding the notion of sovereignty from its specific focus on the executive branch of the government” (p. 407), but it has to do so from a position “that understands the situation of African people, church(es), society(ies) on the one side and the Christian message on the other” (Benda 2012, p. 12). In other words, at least on the basis of what I have presented, it is clear that one of the tasks of APT “is to offer a critique of the dominant role played by the State” (p. 2). It consists of taking seriously the view that we cannot limit our understanding of Political Theology to a system of thought that is responding to an understanding of the state as “focused on a centralized government, as the comprehending institution of society and the primary manifestation and guarantor of public justice” (Stackhouse 2004, p. 288). Such a Political Theology, one that takes the distinction between religion and politics as the foundation of the modern state, fails to “take seriously the particular historical reality of the African subject” (Benda 2012, p. 2) as a religious one or one governed by a continuous “mode of religious consciousness” (Garuba 2003, p. 267 – possible misappropriation noted).

**APT as Life-affirming Positive Theology**

However, thinking of APT as driven by a continuous mode of religious consciousness highlights the localized sense in which Garuba’s animist materialism provides avenues for knowing that are not a rationalist logic. Although Garuba dismisses the possibility of Christianity possessing this ability, he does so from a perspective that sees Christianity as “an Other” of African spirituality, but such is not the case with APT, especially with its focus on life force. That is, much of the literature that references notions of APT emphasises the point that APT is a form of positive theology that is aimed at achieving a condition of wholeness in “the practice of everyday life” (Garuba 2003, p. 285). Simon Maimela (1998), a South African liberation theologian notes, for example, in his chapter examining the relationship between theology and politics in South Africa that, “The scope of political theology is much wider. It does not concentrate only on abuses. Political theology is based on the insight that human beings are increasingly creating their own history and destiny” (p. 9). That is, in response to the functionalist response highlighted above to the approach of examining the relationship between religion and politics critiqued herein, Maimela points to the creative capacity of APT to define the terms of how humans structure and organize life and society (p. 2) or, in Garuba’s terms, “as providing avenues for knowing our way around our world and society” (2003, p. 283). In this sense, APT provides the means to craft the political through the religious.
Moreover, in his articles examining the concept of a Pan-African Political Theology using the partnership of Pan-Africanism and Pentecostalism in Africa, Clifton Clarke (2013) highlights the idea of the positive nature of APT. Drawing on the work of Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, an eminent scholar of Pentecostalism in Africa, Clarke argues that: “I believe a theology of ‘deliverance’ could prove useful in our quest for a Pan-African political theology...Deliverance, in this context, means more than exorcism, the expulsion of evil spirits. It has to do with freeing people from ‘bondage’ to sin and Satan. Politically speaking, this experience of ‘bondage’ could be discerned in both oppressive dictatorial regimes such as those of Amin, Doe, and Mobutu and in the forms of nationalism that absolutized the state” (180). That is, Clarke reaffirms not only the decentring of the state aspect of APT as outlined already, but also emphasizes that the notion of deliverance, drawn from a contextual African Pentecostal understanding, points to a meaning-making process for African subjects in terms of how they imagine and create their own senses of well-being and wholeness. In their work, Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa, Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, affirm this idea that “in order to achieve a condition of wholeness... people [in Africa] feel the need to consult religious specialists” (p. 97). In other words, the centrality of religion (in this case Christian theology) in African life constitutes the positive life affirming notions of the political that lie beyond the Schmittian dyad of friend-foe. This argument of life-affirmation does not deny the negative in religion, but merely points to the ways in which, understood as power, religion in African contexts is understood as inseparable from the material (which poses a direct challenge to some western Christian conceptions of spirit-life) versus matter-dead).

More directly addressing APT as a form of positive theology, Benda (2012) offers a definition of APT as “that forward looking form of theologizing that is positive, healthy, life-affirming and in conformity with the politics of the Christ of the Gospels” (p. 2). Benda’s vision of a positive theology is given further shape by Bongmba’s (2016) study on Cardinal Tumi, where he affirms the life-giving aspects of APT by noting that, “Tumi appeals to political, ethical, economic and spiritual values shared by many people and sees his ministry as an opportunity to serve humanity, promote freedom, and work to improve the human condition” (p. 285). Thus, in a very diametrically opposed understanding of Political Theology of the west, which focuses on questions of how can the state proscribe the reach of religion, APT emphasizes the moral imperative of the state to be life affirming on the basis that a state is supposed to have a social theory of politics based on the convictions of the people that make up the public realm (Stackhouse 2004, p. 291) rather than a state-centric (political) view of society.

While Stackhouse insists that the focus on a social theory of politics should be called Public Theology rather than Political Theology since it is “based on the conviction that the public is prior to the republic, that the fabric of civil society is, of which religious faith and organization is inevitably the core, is more determinative of and normatively more important than politics is for religion” (p. 285), my argument is that such a strict focus on delineation in this context misses the point that both APT as I have defined it and Public
Theology as Stackhouse has defined it challenge the secular state as the final and total arbiter of what constitutes modern subjectivity. In this sense, the way in which Stackhouse defines Public Theology and the way in which I have defined APT in this context constitute what Vincent Lloyd and David True, editors of the journal *Political Theology* referred to earlier, refer to as a third and expansive sense of political theology – the first being a conversation amongst critical theorists on the legacy of Carl Schmitt and the second being a conversation concerning theologically informed politics (2016, p. 505).

According to Lloyd and True, the third way “names critical inquiry into the connections between religion and politics broadly...including ideas, practices, affects, and histories. As such, political theology in this third sense is an intellectual landscape welcoming to both critical scholars positioned as ‘outsiders’ and participants in religious traditions exploring the relationships between the fabric of their own tradition and the political world” (p. 505). In fact, APT, as presented here and represented by the kinds of scholars cited, disturbs the duality of scholar versus practitioner and notes that its claim is precisely that “religion emerges everywhere” (Smith 2012, p. 9) and this “should not be taken as evidence of either African backwardness or failure to separate naturally given categories (such as the public and the private or the sacred and secular) which are, in fact, historically and culturally particular” (p. 10). To the end of embodying this disruptive identity, APT can be said to represent a challenge to the assumption that the generative capacity of religion lies in a transcendent source; rather, APT affirms the immanence of both religion and politics.

**The Limits of APT’s Christian *Missio Dei***?

The assumption inherent within the preceding arguments of Christian theology serving as a positive strand of life affirmation should raise a number of questions with respect to the applicability of such a theology (APT in this context) beyond the purview of those who subscribe to its tenets. That is, as an APT, Christianity assumes to have a “normative model of how to order complex civil societies that reach beyond” (Stackhouse 2004, 289) the identity-based politics of the continent. To that end, the Christianness of APT poses a problem in the context of a pluralistic world comprised of multiple religions and identities, some of which lay a claim to non-religious affiliation. The good news (pun intended) is that a number of the scholars who espouse a discourse of APT speak in the plural of faith communities (Benda 2012); of the importance of “Cameroon and other African countries to think of a public and broad theology that is inclusive, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary” (Bongmba 2016, p. 302); of “the social mission of religion in Africa” (Eze 2008, 170); of “ecclesiological radiances…that are complementary to, affirming of and supportive of positive initiatives, structures and institutions” (Katongole 22014, p. 430) initiated from elsewhere.

Explicitly, as African feminist theologian Isabel Apowo Phiri (2012) concludes in her review of Katongole’s *The Sacrifice of Africa*, “The salvation of Africa is complex and therefore needs multiple approaches...It is a holistic approach informed by faith in the God of creation that can work for Africa. The
work cannot be done by Christians alone...It also requires an interreligious
dimension, which cannot be underplayed in the context of Africa” (pgs. 602-
603). Framed this way, APT can be said to be not “simply the religious
sentiments or experience of a particular community, projected into the artifact
of a cultural self-celebration, that is the source of normative thought and life,
but that it is a revelatory source that stands as the norm” (Stackhouse 2004, p.
291). In other words, APT is not simply a conceptual, sociological construct but
a politics of the “inner personal convictions, the communities of faith, and the
associations that they generate in an open society” (p. 291). It is an
aspirational discursive praxis that is complex, glocal, interdisciplinary, and
plural.

However, the question remains, so what? The first answer to this
question can be provided by way of attending to the issue of definition posed
at the beginning of this paper. That is, what can be proffered as a definition of
African Political Theology that encompasses the key observations made so far
in the preceding discussion? Thus far, I have demonstrated that it is a primarily
Christian enterprise (although by admission of its representatives and my
presentation of the concept of religion this need not be the case necessarily);
it decentres the centrality of the state in African politics and, as such; centres
on the everyday with specific reference to justice; as well as taking seriously
the particularity of African historical reality. The restriction to Christian
theology and Anglophone interlocutors (at least in terms of the language in
which they write) should be read as a reflection of my scholarly limitation
rather than the reach of the concept as such.

The second answer to the question (So what?) can be provided
through an analysis of phenomena that give further credence or challenge the
definition put forward here. To that end, I would like to demonstrate, through
two examples, how another key aspect of APT that is important as tool of
analysis is that it allows us to examine the impact of politics on religion as
much as the other way around. Specifically, the Catholic inflection of APT
highlighted thus far gives the impression that the impact is from religion onto
politics and less the other way around. However, in order to demonstrate a
greater use of the configuration, it would be prudent to also show how it can
help explain some of the ways in which politics, understood as material power,
has impacted on religion as spiritual power. Here, I’d like to draw on the
“prophets phenomenon” and the use of National Days of Prayer (not included
in this discussion) as examples of the greater reach of APT beyond the Catholic
tradition and a limited understanding of the state’s ability to engage with the
everyday through its engagement with prayer as political praxis.

**APT as a Heuristic**

To the end of beginning to analyze this dialectical impact of politics on religion,
Rachel Riedl (2012) has noted that, “the dialectical relationship between the
political opportunity structure and religious politicization is evolving in tandem.
While political liberalization has allowed associational pluralism to expand,
religious organizations experience internal fragmentation and seek political
alliances and recognition in new forms. The variable politicization of religion is
part of a progression in competitive politics in the ongoing search for representation and power” (p. 29). That is to say, while research on religion and politics in Africa is somewhat thriving, the analytical approach of this research tends to focus primarily on the impact of religion on politics. Many interlocutors are quick to point out that one cannot understand state formation in Africa without taking religions seriously (Bayart, Ranger 1986; Haynes 1996; Ferguson 1999; Ellis and ter Haar 2004; Ashforth 2005; Marshall 2009; Meier and Steinforth 2009; Cooke 2015).

However, as Jennifer Cooke (2015) has noted in the report on the study of religious authority and the state in Africa, there has been “less comparative analysis on how religion and religious communities themselves have been shaped by political forces over time” (p. 2). That is, the question of how politics has affected religion needs special attention and the use of ATP as a heuristic tool to understand the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics on the continent is a good starting point. In other words, paying attention to not only how religious identities are politically mobilized (traditional Political Theology), but also how this political mobilization has had an impact on how religions are able to re-imagine their roles in a context of competitive politics, as well as how politics has shaped religious responses to questions of power in Africa (APT), provides us with a truly African centred configuration of Political Theology. APT, as I have mentioned already, provides an answer to the question: what happens when we don’t assume a state-centric relationship between religion and politics in Africa as I have argued so far that APT does? Part of what happens is that we begin to see politics (as per Maimela description above) in everything, including religion.

Prophets Phenomenon

In December 2016, Prophet (Dr) Emmanuel E. Nwazuo of Revolution Fire Christian Ministry, Ojodu, Lagos State, Nigeria, shared his 2017 prophecies for Nigeria. In an interview with Tribune Church he declared: “I see the unfolding of a one-state party, one-state religion and forceful conversion of people and property through legislative laws. Emir of Kano should be very careful as I see him having issues with the government of the day. I see the Biafra dream resonating with more regions clamouring for self-determination. I see the present government boxed into confusion owing to party decimation and internal implosion. The Lord says that beginning from 2017, there shall be sustained programmes to completely silence every voice of opposition, suppression of individual wills and opinions and a careful plan to force every one towards one direction in the political landscape of Nigeria. I see cabinet reshuffle coming with many political jobbers crying foul over their exclusions. Beginning from 2017 the main hidden agenda shall begin to unfold but the Lord who rules over the affairs of men shall intervene” (http://tribuneonlineng.com/2017-year-judgment-nigeria-prophet-nwazuo/).

In Ghana, reports Stan Chu Ilo, Dr. Akwasi Agyemang Prempeh, created a stir on New Year's Day “by predicting that the incumbent president, John Mahama will win the November 2016 election. His prediction was, of course, welcomed and widely publicised by the ruling party, but many others
questioned his credentials” (http://allafrica.com/stories/201603010697.html). In South Africa, Prophet Samuel Akinbodunse, who is the General Overseer of Freedom For all Nations Outreach (FANO), released his international prophesies for 2018. Amongst other things primarily focused on global politics, he stated that: “2. First Quarter of 2018 in South African Politics. There will be a shaking. Some people will be removed for God to carry out his agenda. There will be a shift in the presidency. A well known [sic] will fall in order to make way for someone else to take over. 3. Zimbabwe will encounter economic change. Investors from all around the world including South Africa will flood Zimbabwe. All Zimbabweans should embrace embrace [sic] their current president. God is using him to lift the nation up. Zimbabweans in the diaspora will be returning home. 11. There will be a large arrest of evil doers against the saints and there will be peace in many lives. 12. 2018 is the year for true churches to grow at a fast rate including FANO” (https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/01/south-african-based-nigerian-prophet-samuel-akinbodunse-releases-shocking-2018-prophecies/).

These stories are representative of a large pool of narratives about prophets, generally referred to as “men of God,” who deliver prophecies covering everything from the mundane to the incredulous. The list includes well established prophets such as Madzibaba Wimbo from Zimbabwe, newcomers such as the South African-based Malawian Shepherd Bushiri, and internationally acclaimed ones like T. B. Joshua of Nigeria. Judging by some of the response these men have received from state officials, they have demonstrated to be quite influential in political circles. One of the many ways of reading the “prophets phenomenon” is to use it as an instantiation of a response to the perception that a different kind of authority is necessary as a corrective to the issue of the failure of the state to address key issues of well-being for African citizens. However, this offers a very limited understanding of the significant role that these religious prophets play in the reconfiguration of post-colonial African politics. Therefore, a stronger account of how these prophets influence and are influenced by political decisions through their prophecies is necessary if a different account of “the political” in Africa is to be gleaned.

In highlight the proliferation of the “prophets phenomenon” and underscoring the need for continued corrective research on the topic, for example, scholars such as Chitando, Gunda, and Kugler, have drawn on the particular case of Zimbabwe as an example of how such analytical work might look like. As they note:

From about 2009 to the time of writing, Zimbabwe has been under the grip of a ‘prophetic craze.’ Young Pentecostal church founders emerged on the scene, preaching the gospel of prosperity and having miracles of varying levels of sophistication attributed to them. Operating predominantly from urban centres (especially Harare, the capital) and having Pan-African connections (‘spiritual fathers’ from West Africa), these young prophets transformed the religious landscape in a fundamental way. Although responses to their presence are often diametrically
opposed, with some acknowledging them as being ‘truly of God’ and others dismissing them as ‘gospelpreneurs’ who are after money, there is a general consensus that scholars from biblical and religious studies must invest in studying them. (Chitando, Gunda & Kügler 2013, 9)

While these scholars highlight the need for biblical and religious studies to be more invested in the topic, they fail to emphasize the need for political scientists to pay more attention to the phenomenon as the words and works of these “men of God” have been shown to have direct impact on political leadership across the continent (Kwaramb 2011; Musendekwa 2011; Matikiti 2012; Manyeruke & Hamauswa 2013).

That is, while the general research trend on the “prophets phenomenon” (Chitando, Gunda, Kugler 2013; Hamen 2014; Makonyi 2015; Omenyo 2011), has been to focus on rationally explaining (away) these self-styled prophets in Sub-Saharan Africa, who claim to be able to cure diseases, alleviate poverty, and to travel into the underworld to fight evil amongst many other things, as charlatans and gospelpreneurs, there is another way of reading the prophets phenomenon through the lens of APT that takes seriously the impact of politics on religion. If taken seriously, the key question that animates the research on these prophets (which has had to do with whether these self-styled prophets, who usually work outside the parameters of traditional church contexts, represent a direct religious response to the perceived state failure in Africa) represents an opportunity to expand on the notion of APT from a Pentecostal movement perspective. That is, as a tradition also localized and contextualized for the African continent, Pentecostalism has not been the individualistic, pious type of movement on the continent, but as scholars such as Marshall (2016) and Nimi Wariboko (2015) have shown, Pentecostal churches are speaking to the particularity of their contexts through a spirit-led revolution. Moreover, they are doing so using the logic of transforming public squares into hallowed ground and by gathering multitudes of people power for what they perceive as mass action (Clarke 2013, 178) – all concepts drawn from the grammar of the polis.

It is notable, for example, that while much of the contemporary prophets challenge state authority at the religious level, they also, however, bolster normative gender power hierarchies by blessing or supporting male heads of states, whether in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, or Zimbabwe and promoting their particular brand of spiritual power in gendered terms of fatherhood and husbandhood – i.e. they are taking care of the nation as their family the same way that a father or husband should in conservative Pentecostal Christian terms. In a chapter entitled “Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe” (2013), authors Ezra Chitando, Molly Manyonganise, and Bernard Mlambo analyze the tension due to the generational differences between younger new prophets and the older founders of the Pentecostal churches, and equate this tension with the similar generational change in the political arena in Zimbabwe (p. 153). That is, they see a similar process of challenging power between what these young men are doing as prophets and what is happening on the political scene. Through challenging state authority
and claiming the location of power beyond the state, thus offering the possibility of conceptualizing power and transformation as not limited to bureaucratic processes but also as available through other means, these “men of God” could be perceived as contributing to the Lefortian (1986) radical democratic notion of empty spaces of power by demonstrating that even contentious religious masculinities have space to exist alongside other forms of political masculinities, where the expression that “power belongs to no one” (Lefort 1986) might find new meaning and confluence which challenges to the politics of the belly narrative. Where, from an APT perspective, the “men of God” promote a non-state centric understanding of power and frame their own significance with respect to responding to the everyday ailments that concern people on the ground. Of course this is a generous reading, but I am arguing that such a reading attests to the notion of APT developed in this paper thus far.

**Preliminary Conclusions?**

While neither the proliferation of the prophetic tradition nor the state using religion instrumentally are nothing new on the continent, their confluence at this particular moment marked by a general global sense of uncertainty and suspicion poses interesting questions for social scientists, religious practitioners, and politicians. The set of questions that I am interested in have to do primarily with social scientists and their practice of category-making and naming phenomena – in this case, in thinking through and developing the notion of an African Political Theology. In fact, given the generalized perception that since African states “have failed” to perform their bureaucratic duty of governance in meaningful and holistic ways in the general post-colonial era (supposedly perceptible in the degradation of state governance models across the continent that has resulted in the creation of a series of crises across the continent) (Helman and Ratner 1993; Allen 1995; Herbst 1996; Mkandawire 2001; Cooper 2002; Torres and Anderson 2004), is it enough to interpret what the “prophets” are doing as vying not only for spiritual power, but also political power? Or, is it possible to read their actions not just in simple terms of response but also of affirming a positive life force that is inherent within a generalized sense of power that permeates all of life in Africa? What might such a reading add to the concept of thinking religion through political concepts as has been suggested?