

Intervention and colonial-modernity: decolonising the Italy/Ethiopia conflict through Psalms 68:31

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Abstract. In this article I utilise the editors' conceptual frame of sovereignty/intervention/transnational social forces to argue that the relationship that ensues between these phenomena has to be understood in colonial-modern – rather than modern – terms. I thereby argue that intervention is a distinctive technology of colonial-modern rule, specifically, one that erects and polices the difference between sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities via a standard of civilisation. Additionally, I argue that transnational social forces struggle – cognitively, socially, and politically – over the upholding or refuting of this standard; and in this struggle, some might even defend particular sovereign entities against colonial interventions. I demonstrate my argument by explicating the global colonial context of the Italy/Ethiopia conflict in 1935–6, the nadir of the interwar crisis. I 'decolonise' received interpretations of the conflict through the heuristic of two differing catechisms of Psalms 68:31 proffered at the time: one, invoking a civilising mission of Africans; the other, invoking a project of self-liberation by Africans.

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Introduction

Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

Psalms 68:31

When, in April 1935, Roberto Mussolini ordered the build up of Italian forces in Eritrea and Italian Somaliland pending an invasion of Ethiopia, Emperor Haile Selassie I entreated members of the League of Nations to respond to Italian aggression with concrete measures. A groundswell of public opinion in Great Britain supported the Emperor. An *Urgent Plea for Prayer*, published by the British-based Missionary Service Bureau and the Ethiopian Prayer League, laid down in a Foreword the stark choice facing European civilisation: 'Ethiopia ... is stretching out her hands unto God. Will His people come to her aid regardless of personal sacrifice or inconvenience?'¹

¹ Cited in Richard Pankhurst, 'Pro- and Anti- Ethiopian Pamphleteering in Britain During the Italian Fascist Invasion and Occupation (1935–41)', *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 1:1 (2003), p. 164.

God's people, it should be underscored, were Europeans who were charged with saving Ethiopians. However, a Jamaican, Mrs Satira Earle, proffered a different interpretation of Psalms 68:31: 'the year 1935 was the commencing of Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto God and not unto Europe as they think'.² An active member of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, Mrs Earle prophesied the conflict as delayed divine justice for the accumulated wrongdoing of European slave masters. Ethiopians – Africans in general – were going to save themselves. These two different catechisms of Psalms 68:31 heralded the coming of the Second World War.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia is perhaps the most acute 'classical' example of the failures of collective security and international law. Alfred Zimmern certainly thought so at the time.³ A decade later, Hans Morgenthau revisited the conflict in the first edition of *Politics Among Nations* and claimed that, 'for the first and thus far the last time, an attempt was made to apply collective security in a concrete case'.⁴ Smarting from the defeat of the Italian army by Ethiopian forces at the Battle of Adwa in 1896, and longing to consolidate its empire in the Horn of Africa, Mussolini had orchestrated a border incident at Wal Wal in 1934 and in October 1935 invaded Ethiopian territory. In effect, one sovereign member of the League of Nations invaded another sovereign member, and the League could muster no political will to intervene. Subsequent scholars have pointed out that, unlike the Manchurian crisis of 1931, there was no ambiguity over the initial aggression from Italy, and that the establishment of oil sanctions and the closing of the Suez Canal could have destroyed Mussolini's east African war machine in a short period of time.⁵ If the 'twenty years crisis' is the seedbed of the self-conception of International Relations as a discipline,⁶ then the Italy/Ethiopia war is exemplary of its fundamental problematique: the orderly pursuit of collective security within a system of sovereign states. Key to the ordering/disordering of this system is, of course, intervention.

The editors of this Special Issue define intervention as referring to a discrete act of coercive interference by one or more states into the domestic jurisdiction of another state. They then relate this definition of intervention to a distinctly modern mode of coercive reordering that mediates between the territorial sovereign state and transnational social forces associated especially with Marxist and Weberian historical sociologies, that is, industrialisation, rational statebuilding, and the rise of ideologies of progress. The editors differentiate modern intervention from formal empire – which denies sovereign statehood – as well as from war – which is destructive of the transnational social domain. In specifying the quintessentially modern character of intervention the editors have performed a very valuable task. They have clarified the sociological content of the concept and have therefore cleared a critical space wherein

² Cited in Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and Its Aftermath* (The Hague; Boston: Nijhoff, 1978), p. 171.

³ Alfred Zimmern, *The League of Nations and the Rule of Law, 1918–1935* (London: Macmillan, 1936), pp. 449–50.

⁴ Hans Joachim Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1948), p. 336.

⁵ Michael Howard, *War and the Liberal Conscience* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1978), p. 92; Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of 'Civilization' in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 129.

⁶ See Brian Schmidt (ed.), *International Relations and the First Great Debate* (London: Routledge, 2012).

implicit meanings and valuations cannot hide or be assumed but must now be scrutinised out in the open.

In the same spirit of inquiry I aim to draw attention to the expunging of colonial rule from engagements with the sociology of modernity, which are undertaken in order to clarify key *problematiques* of International Relations (IR). I argue that intervention is a distinctive technology of *colonial-modern* rule. ‘Colonial-modernity’ marks modernity as already – and congenitally – colonial in its constitution. This is in contradistinction to a sociological framing of intervention as fundamentally modern rule – as is the case with Marxist or Weberian narratives⁷ – even if at some point practices and *problematiques* of colonialism are introduced or added. By this reasoning, intervention does not so much arise as a modern practice that coercively mediates between European sovereign states and attendant transnational social forces, even if this mediation takes on a subsequent global trajectory. Rather, intervention is a colonial-modern technology at its *point of departure*, specifically, one that erects and polices the difference between sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities via a standard of civilisation. Likewise, colonial-modern transnational social forces struggle – cognitively, socially, and politically – over the upholding or refuting of this standard; some might even defend particular sovereign entities against colonial interventions.

In this article I shall focus on that seminal case study for IR, the Italy/Ethiopia conflict, in order to ‘decolonise’ our understanding of modern intervention. I shall utilise the editors’ conceptual frame of sovereignty/transnational social forces, but I shall show that the relationship that ensues between these phenomena has to be understood in colonial-modern – rather than modern – terms. In fine, the following investigation questions the degree to which we can consider modern intervention to be conceptually and practically distinct from imperial rule and (colonial) war; and it highlights the fundamental importance of slavery and colonialism in the constitution of transnational social forces.

For these purposes, I shall anchor my argument on the two catechisms of Psalms 68:31 introduced above. In the case of the Italy/Ethiopia conflict, the key issue of contention was the European adjudication of Ethiopia’s sovereignty by reference to a standard of civilisation that rested upon the existence of domestic slavery and that legitimised intervention, whether coercive (as war) or ‘consensual’ (as wardship). The first catechism is cognate to this adjudication, that is, that civilised Europeans must save Ethiopians from their less-than-civilised selves as well as from degenerate Europeans. This specific articulation of a ‘civilising mission’ hermeneutic has precedents in the emergence of white abolitionism in the 1770s. Alternatively, a Pan-African movement emerged in the British Caribbean colonies to contest Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia as well as the quiescence of the colonial masters. This transnational social force, cohering around a hermeneutic of ‘Ethiopianism’, impelled African-Caribbeans to side with and cognitively, culturally, and politically identify with Ethiopia – despite their status as British subjects of different colonies – in order to fully liberate themselves. The second catechism of Psalms 68:31 arises out of this movement. However, before investigating the history and interpretive logics of these two catechisms of Psalms 68:31, I will first spend a little time fleshing out the notion of colonial-modernity and its associated decolonial methodology.

⁷ See Gurminder K. Bhambra, ‘Talking Among Themselves? Weberian and Marxist Historical Sociologies as Dialogues Without “Others”’, *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 39:3 (1 May 2011), pp. 667–81.

Intervention and colonial-modernity

Enrique Dussel argues that modernity is indeed a European invention, but one that ‘is constituted in a dialectical relationship with non-European alterity that is its ultimate content’;⁸ or, as Anibal Quijano puts it, ‘modernity is colonial from its point of departure’.⁹ A rich body of work has demonstrated that the ‘modern’ is constitutive of – and in fundamental ways constituted by – the logic of colonial rule.¹⁰ Key to this logic is the construction of racial difference and the temporal and spatial maintenance of this difference.¹¹ Racial difference is articulated cognitively through notions of temporality – the backward, undeveloped, child-like primitive, savage or barbaric, as opposed to the progressive, developed, mature, advanced, and civilised. It is this difference that is implicated within the classic sociological division between tradition (the premodern) and modernity.¹² Substantively, racial difference is articulated through spatial arrangements – legal and otherwise – that demarcate certain territories and their non-European and/or non-white populations as lacking in appropriate cultural and political norms and values that make up a ‘standard of civilization’.¹³ I would suggest that the principle of colonial difference is fundamental to the practice of intervention and as such underpins all three hierarchies identified by the editors of this Special Issue: great power politics, economy, and culture.¹⁴ I shall now sketch out how this critique of colonial difference might illuminate the relationship between intervention and sovereignty in international law.¹⁵

Anthony Anghie and B. S. Chimni argue that the instruments of the European law of nations were not developed from a universalist blueprint; rather, the universalisation of this law was integral to the construction and regulation of colonial difference.¹⁶ Along similar lines, Siba Grovogui notes that colonial jurisprudence was not an addition to, but part of the very constitution of international law, its rationale being to express and buttress colonial difference along the lines of race.¹⁷ Indeed,

⁸ Enrique Dussel, ‘Eurocentrism and Modernity’, *Boundary 2*, 20:3 (1993), p. 65.

⁹ A. Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America’, *International Sociology*, 15:2 (2000), p. 548.

¹⁰ In IR, see for example, Lucy Taylor, ‘Decolonizing International Relations: Perspectives from Latin America’, *International Studies Review*, 14:3 (2012), pp. 386–400; Sankaran Krishna, ‘Race, Amnesia, and the Education of International Relations’, *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24; B. Gruffydd-Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

¹¹ See Walter Mignolo, ‘Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality’, *Cultural Studies*, 21:2 (2007), pp. 470–4.

¹² See Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America’; Gurinder K. Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹³ See B. Bowden, ‘In the Name of Progress and Peace: The “Standard of Civilization” and the Universalising Project’, *Alternatives*, 29 (2004), pp. 43–68; Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ As Aimé Césaire noted long ago, technologies of rule that are developed in the colonies usually return quite quickly to imperial centres, there to impact on the ordering of European societies and states and their immediate environs; *Discourse on Colonialism* (London: Monthly Review Press, 2000). In this respect, see the article in this Special Issue by Susan Woodward.

¹⁵ For a contemporary critique see Robert Knox, ‘Civilising Interventions? Race, War and International Law’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1 (2013), pp. 11–132.

¹⁶ ‘Third World Approaches to International Law and Individual Responsibility in Internal Conflicts’, *Chinese Journal of International Law*, 2 (2003), p. 84.

¹⁷ *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 15.

the key principle of international law – sovereignty – was shaped congenitally through the colonial relationship, especially regarding its use in determining how and why non-European political entities were not adequately sovereign in the first place. In this respect, the prime mandate of European international law was not to enable ‘order among sovereign states’ but rather to dynamically shape ‘the problem of cultural difference’.¹⁸

As I have suggested, the instrument to assess and regulate this problem of difference was a standard of civilisation that, even in its incipient design, denoted a lack of competency by some polities in managing their internal affairs. In his narrative on the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Vitoria famously stated that although they were – as humans – bound by natural law, the capabilities of indigenous peoples were deficient for this task hence requiring the intervention of Spanish agents on behalf of natural law.¹⁹ Jurists in the nineteenth century rearticulated this colonial difference through the rubric of positive law.²⁰ So while sovereignty could be attributed to political entities on an evidential basis, it was their particular civil arrangements that determined whether they were competent enough to enter the ‘family of nations’. In this era, the status of ‘quasi-sovereign’ was granted precisely so as to ‘enable’ less-than-civilised – that is, deficient – polities to legally transfer their governance to colonial authority.²¹ In other words, non-European/non-white polities could only enter the family of nations as wards of European imperial powers. Christian and European imperial states therefore judged themselves to be both sovereign and civilised; non-European powers, even if Christian (for example, Ethiopia), and even if *de facto* recognised as sovereign entities, could not competently meet the standard of civilisation.²² The latter, being *de facto* sovereign yet not adequately civilised, might still be lawfully intervened upon – coercively or ‘consensually’ – by sovereign *and* civilised powers.

In this respect, it is important to note that Lassa Oppenheim, a legal thinker in the nineteenth-century positivist tradition – and one whom the editors of this Special Issue employ for definitional purposes – situates his discussion of intervention explicitly within the narrative of Europe’s intra-familial life.²³ Intervention, to Oppenheim, is against the law of nations, which is nevertheless a particular law ‘between all the civilized States as equal members of the Family of Nations’.²⁴ But in another section, Oppenheim provides a different set of rules for European engagements with polities that are not members of this family.²⁵ Therefore, while Oppenheim might reserve the technical term ‘(non)-intervention’ for the intra-familial affairs of Europe, the substance of intervention owes to a practice of policing (colonial) difference globally. By this reading, it is inadequate to sociologically demarcate modern intervention

¹⁸ Antony Anghie, ‘The Evolution of International Law: Colonial and Postcolonial Realities’, *Third World Quarterly*, 27:5 (2006), pp. 741–2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 743; Brett Bowden, ‘The Colonial Origins of International Law: European Expansion and the Classical Standard of Civilization’, *Journal of the History of International Law*, 7 (2005), p. 11.

²⁰ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 52–3; Chidi Oguamanam, ‘Indigenous Peoples and International Law: The Making of a Regime’, *Queen’s Law Journal*, 30:1 (2004), pp. 353–7.

²¹ Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, p. 745.

²² Anghie, *Making of International Law*, 58–9; Bowden, ‘The Colonial Origins of International Law’, p. 16.

²³ Ronald F. Roxburgh (ed.), *International Law: A Treatise* vol. 1 (3rd edn, New Jersey: Lawbook Exchange, Ltd, 1920), p. 222.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, ch. 10.

from imperial rule, including colonial wars, because international law implicates all of these ordering/reordering technologies in its regulation of colonial difference. In short, sovereignty and non-intervention are formatively paired to quasi-sovereignty and intervention.

The above argument reveals modern intervention to have a conjoined double life. One life, a 'modern' European one, involves primarily the principle of non-intervention and is a practice of inter-sovereign rule. The other – contemporaneous – life, manifests as a standard through which to judge political entities as either civilised or uncivilised and is a practice of colonial-modern rule. The former modern life is an intra-*familiar* affair; it is not substantively the seedbed of international *public* law. The latter is the colonial-modern life of international relations proper, that is, the construction of hierarchy between polities that are cognitively and practically made *different*. The latter nurtures the former.

Enabled by this colonial-modern sensibility, I argue below that in the nineteenth century, the standard of civilisation was adjudicated first and foremost by the existence of domestic slavery. This is the prime criterion upon which Ethiopia, in the early twentieth century, was to be judged less-than-civilised by the family of European (imperial) nations, thereby enabling intervention in its domestic arrangements, either through the offices of the League or by imperial war. The first catechism of Psalms 68:31 enunciated by the Missionary Service Bureau speaks directly to this context through the civilising mission, that civilised Europeans must save Ethiopians from themselves and/or degenerate Europeans.

I have argued so far that decolonising International Relations theory requires us to dwell at the site of colonial difference rather than, facing in a particular direction, conceptually disavow colonial rule from our sociological rendering of modernity. I have also made the case that colonial difference is adjudicated through the attribution of (in)competency to racialised groups. And as with law and politics, so too with cognition and thought: only particular types of peoples are assumed to possess cognitive abilities that are competent for apprehending a distinctly 'modern' existence. Here, cognitive competency is adjudicated by the degree to which one can apprehend a distinctly *colonial-modern* existence.²⁶ However, the decolonising agenda invites us to consider, in principle, that these 'incompetent' cognitive abilities might actually allow colonial peoples to cultivate interpretive resources that are 'other-wise'. By the phrase 'other-wise' I mark a distance from Nietzsche's colonising episteme that presents slave ethics only as a hollow reactionary protest (a body) entirely dependent upon the slave masters' agency (the mind).²⁷ 'Slaves' have no independent agency, but 'enslaved peoples', in principle, do. Thus, I advocate for a critical retrieval of still-living hermeneutics cultivated by colonised peoples (in this case, enslaved Africans and their descendents), that have been disavowed by the episteme of modernity.²⁸ These interpretive resources proactively apprehend transnational social forces in fundamentally global terms as contending over colonial difference.

In the second part of this article, I retrieve the 'other-wise' hermeneutic of Ethiopianism that is suggested in Mrs Earle's catechism of Psalm 68:31. This retrieval opens the way to an apprehension of the twenty years crisis as a showdown over the

²⁶ Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Genealogy of Morals: An Attack', *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 170–1.

²⁸ See Robbie Shilliam, 'Decolonising the Grounds of Ethical Inquiry: A Dialogue Between Kant, Foucault and Glissant', *Millennium*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 649–65.

global colonial order rather than as a suicidal intra-familial fight among European great powers. Understood through this interpretive tradition, it is not the preservation of a civilising mission that is at stake in the Italy/Ethiopia conflict but rather the dissolution of the racist standard of civilisation itself. A race consciousness is cultivated amongst descendants of enslaved Africans in the Anglo-Caribbean (as well as in the US) in order to redeem a humanity outlawed by 'civilised' European powers in their policing of colonial difference, firstly through the legal instantiation of slavery in the Americas, and subsequently through 'abolition' of the practice on the African continent. Cohering as a transnational social force, advocates of Ethiopianism *defend* Ethiopia's sovereignty as part of their own liberation struggle against this global colonial order.

The first catechism of Psalms 68:31: Atlantic slavery, African colonisation, and the civilising mission

From 1855, Emperor Tewodros II began in earnest the centralisation of a loose patchwork of principalities that at the time formed Ethiopia. Without embarking on such a process, Ethiopia would have soon been carved up between Italy, France, and Britain – the key encroaching imperial powers in the horn of Africa. Central to this defence was a recognition by European powers that Ethiopia was a 'civilised' polity, sovereign unto itself and thus deserving the protection of the law of nations under diplomatic protocols. A crucial moment in this cognitive struggle occurred when in 1889 Emperor Menelik II sought an agreement with Italy over its Eritrean borders. The Italian version of the Treaty of Wuchale translated article 17 as effectively placing Ethiopia as a protectorate, while the Ethiopian version simply provided the option of diplomatic engagement with third agents through Italian channels.²⁹ Italy was roundly defeated in the resulting battle at Adwa and the subsequent Treaty confirmed Ethiopia as an independent polity.³⁰ Nevertheless, in 1906, and without consulting an ailing Menelik II, Britain, France, and Italy signed a tripartite treaty that putatively affirmed Ethiopia's independence but also set out each imperial power's interests in the country and lay down guides for future activities in the region.³¹ With Ethiopian sovereignty consistently questioned by the activities of the surrounding colonial powers, Selassie I, then Crown Prince Ras Tafari, led an effort in the early 1920s for admission of Ethiopia into the supposedly protective arms of the League. The prime criterion for assessing whether this African polity was civilised enough for admission pertained to the domestic existence of slavery and the slave trade.

The recognition of Ethiopian sovereignty was from the start entangled with the deeper legacies of Atlantic slavery. In fact, the British mission to Ethiopia that crafted the first bilateral treaty in 1841 was also charged with garnering evidence of the existence of slavery.³² As Susanne Miers has ably demonstrated, anti-slavery policies

²⁹ Jean Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations: Ethiopia as a Civilised Nation', *Journal of the History of International Law*, 8 (2006), p. 217.

³⁰ See in general, Raymond Anthony Jonas, *The Battle of Adwa: African Victory in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

³¹ Antoinette Ladarola, 'Ethiopia's Admission Into the League of Nations: An Assessment of Motives', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 8:4 (1975), p. 603.

³² Edward Ullendorff and C. F. Beckingham, 'The First Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 9:1 (1964), p. 196.

had throughout the nineteenth century been used to defend and promote British commercial interests.³³ Immediately after the slave trade abolition bill in 1807, successive British governments sought to put in place an international ban, lest other imperial powers benefit from the lucrative trade and accumulation of labourers in their own colonies.³⁴ Wherever various forms of slave holding benefitted British colonial rule, such practices were conveniently categorised as ‘custom’, a precedent borrowed from British rule in India.³⁵ Alternatively, in the aftermath of the 1807 slave trade abolition act, groups of middle-class evangelicals with strong connections to MPs, government officials, and missionary societies continued to push for the eradication of slavery, albeit this time outside of the American continents. Thomas Hodgkin’s *Aborigine Protection Society* was the most influential of its kind. Often pitting itself against the naked commercial interests of colonial rule, especially with regards to slavery and slave trading, the *Society* promoted benign humanitarian governance of indigenous populations.

Yet if its moral concerns occasionally clashed with the colonial office, the *Society* shared the same racialised understanding of the civilising mission. For humanitarian, civil servant, and politician, the improvement of native peoples lay in education through Christianity, British commerce and its associated propriety habits.³⁶ These two mutually supportive, yet oftentimes opposing forces – British colonial interests and British anti-slavery humanitarianism – continued into the *fin de siècle* and indeed did much to formulate the criterion by which Ethiopia would be judged civilised at the League. An examination of their differing but fundamentally cognate enterprises reveals the inadequacy of modernist distinctions between war, empire, and intervention. At the very least, such a sociological distinction obfuscates the primary colonial-modern ordering of global order into sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities.

The Berlin ‘Congo Conference’ of 1884–5 explicated the principle of quasi-sovereignty of native authorities, meaning that their sovereignty was meaningfully acknowledged only in terms of being ‘disposed’ of to colonial authorities.³⁷ Subsequently, the British-sponsored Brussels Act of 1890 affirmed native welfare as an international responsibility and, in this regard, singled out the evils of slavery and the slave trade.³⁸ As Miers notes, the Act effectively ‘put an anti-slavery guise on the colonial occupation and exploitation of Africa’.³⁹ Through these legal instruments, the wars of conquest undertaken by the European ‘family of nations’ prior to the First World War could be legitimated as interventions against domestic slavery. Subsequently, in 1919, these instruments were incorporated into those of the League

³³ See, for example, ‘Slavery and the Slave Trade as International Issues 1890–1939’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 19:2 (1998), pp. 16–37.

³⁴ In general, see Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁵ Miers, ‘Slavery and the Slave Trade’, p. 20.

³⁶ On these issues see Raymond M. Cooke, ‘British Evangelicals and the Issue of Colonial Self-Government’, *Pacific Historical Review*, 34:2 (1965), pp. 127–40; Zoë Laidlaw, ‘Heathens, Slaves and Aborigines: Thomas Hodgkin’s Critique of Missions and Anti-slavery’, *History Workshop Journal*, 64:1 (21 September 2007), pp. 133–61; and Jams Heartfield, *The Aborigines’ Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa, and the Congo, 1837–1909* (London: Hurst & Company, 2011).

³⁷ Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, pp. 79–81.

³⁸ See Suzanne Miers, ‘Humanitarianism at Berlin: Myth or Reality?’, in S. Förster, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, and Ronald Robinson (eds), *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference 1884–1885 and the Onset of Partition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 333–45.

³⁹ Miers, ‘Slavery and the Slave Trade’, p. 19.

in the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. During this period, the Anti-slavery Society, having merged with the Aborigines Protection Society in 1909, reasoned that the newly formed League opened up new opportunities for anti-slavery lobbying outside of the channels controlled by the British government.⁴⁰ In this aim, they were joined by the League of Nations Union, a broadly liberal – yet not necessarily anti-colonial – society that aimed to educate the general population of Britain with regards to the value of collective security.⁴¹ Ethiopia became the prime target of this paternalist intervention programme into the domestic arrangements of less-than-civilised polities.

While the anti-slavery society initially supported Ethiopia's admission to the League on the assumption that it would 'internationalise' the slave issue, the British government – despite some torpid anti-slavery rhetoric – opposed entry for fear of growing French interference in the region.⁴² The League's subcommittee charged with assessing the level of Ethiopian civilisation proposed that its representatives sign a pre-admission declaration to, among other requisites, 'endeavour to secure the complete suppression of slavery in all its forms and of the slave trade by land and sea'.⁴³ Ras Tafari, personally committed to outlawing slavery, acutely aware of the conducive relationship between anti-slavery moralism and European colonial expansion, and building on the attempts of his predecessor Menelik II, issued a proclamation outlawing slave raiding in September 1923. This followed almost immediately after admission to the League. Meanwhile, the anti-slavery society continued to use the League to benevolently pressure Ras Tafari to drive forward anti-slavery legislation in his domestic constituency.⁴⁴

Suspicious over Ethiopia's competency as a civilised-sovereign entity had been circulating for a while amongst jurists. For example, despite explicitly acknowledging the Christian status of Ethiopia, Oppenheim, in the 1920 edition of his *Treatise on International Law*, still included the polity in his chapter that dealt with non-Christian states judged to be outside of the 'family of nations'.⁴⁵ The degree to which suspicions over Ethiopia's civilised status were openly entertained at the League can be demonstrated by the fact that Lord Lugard's 1924 report to the Temporary Slavery Commission annexed a consideration specifically regarding Ethiopia. The annex noted that slavery and the slave trade still existed on the ground and that admission to the League should not have been carried out.⁴⁶ Additionally, throughout 1925 the British government consistently singled out Ethiopia in its discussions regarding a draft convention that would require League members to once again affirm their commitment to anti-slavery principles. In fact, Austen Chamberlain, at that point secretary of state for foreign affairs, directly used the language of intervention to the consul-general in Ethiopia with regards to Ras Tafari being unable to uphold these principles.⁴⁷ Ras Tafari certainly felt that the civilised status of Ethiopia had to be

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴¹ Ladarola, 'Ethiopia's Admission Into the League of Nations', p. 608.

⁴² Ibid., p. 621.

⁴³ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', p. 222.

⁴⁴ H. N. Fieldhouse, 'Noel Edward Buxton, The Anti-Slavery Society and British Policy With Respect to Ethiopia, 1932–1944', *Historical Papers/Communications Historiques*, 7:1 (1972), p. 293.

⁴⁵ Oppenheim, *International Law: A Treatise*, vol. 1, ch. 10.

⁴⁶ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', pp. 230–1.

⁴⁷ National Archives UK, Foreign Office (FO) 141/640, 'Austen Chamberlain to Mr Bentinck' (15 October 1925).

constantly proven even after admission. In considering the draft anti-slavery convention, Ethiopia was the only member of the League to attach a declaration of concurrence with the document's humanitarian principles.⁴⁸

The point, then, is that even the *de jure* recognition of Ethiopian sovereignty did not arrest the ongoing procedural assessment of this sovereignty by reference to a standard of civilisation adjudicated by the presence or not of domestic slavery. Colonial difference did not only structure the mandate system of the League, but also the relationships between its fully paid up members. True, Ras Tafari managed to outmanoeuvre many critics in the League when, after becoming Emperor Haile Selassie I, he invited the anti-slavery society to make practical recommendations for enforcing domestic anti-slavery ordinances.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, three years after Selassie I's coronation, Lugard published an article on present-day slavery in the journal of his International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, an organisation effectively designed to facilitate 'scientific' governance of the colonies. Lugard maintained that after the abolition of slavery in the Americas, the institution now existed 'only in Abyssinia and Arabia'.⁵⁰

And even at the outset of the Italian incursion, European statesmen remained suspicious that Ethiopia was not sufficiently civilised and hence not quite competent in its *de jure* sovereign status. This suspicion is evident in the committee established in 1935 to conciliate between Italy and Ethiopia. Despite the latter sovereign suffering territorial incursion, the committee made interventionist recommendations that Ethiopia should reorganise aspects of its government.⁵¹ Regardless, Mussolini proceeded to define the invasion as a colonial war – denoting an absence of sovereignty on Ethiopia's part – instead of a conflict within the family of nations. And this argument was tacitly accepted by the main powers of the League.⁵² Furthermore, Mussolini's retroactive justification also hinged upon an interventionary act in Ethiopia's domestic constituency, that is, the freeing of slaves, and the League's advisory committee of experts effectively legitimised this justification *post facto*.⁵³ In short, both war and intervention in Ethiopia's sovereign affairs were justified by the League – procedurally or emphatically – according to a standard of civilisation (selectively) determined by the existence of domestic slavery.

Nevertheless, the invasion by Italy in October 1935 did complicate the terms of the debate over Ethiopia's civilised competencies. For, as H. N. Fieldhouse puts it, 'the question of slavery was now unavoidably entangled with that of the maintenance of the principle of collective security'.⁵⁴ In 1936, Zimmern would write of the 'duty which the advanced peoples owe to their backward brothers, a duty rendered more imperative by the memory of the slave trade and other past misdeeds'.⁵⁵ Henceforth, the moral lens was turned back upon European (in)actions rather than fixated solely upon African incompetency. Indeed, such was the public outcry at the proposals

⁴⁸ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', p. 232.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Miers, 'Britain and the Suppression of Slavery in Ethiopia', *Slavery & Abolition*, 18:3 (1997), p. 271.

⁵⁰ Lord Lugard, 'Slavery in All Its Forms', *Africa*, 6:1 (1933), p. 12.

⁵¹ Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', p. 236.

⁵² Alfred Zimmern, 'The Testing of the League', *Foreign Affairs*, 14:3 (1936), p. 127.

⁵³ See Allain, 'Slavery and the League of Nations', pp. 241–2.

⁵⁴ Fieldhouse, 'Noel Edward Buxton, The Anti-Slavery Society and British Policy', p. 298.

⁵⁵ Alfred Zimmern, 'The Problem of Collective Security', in Quincy Wright (ed.), *Neutrality and Collective Security* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 76.

mooted in December 1935 by the British foreign secretary and French prime ministers to effectively carve up Ethiopia for Mussolini's benefit that both had to resign. It is in this context that the Missionary Service Bureau quoted Psalms 68:31, asking whether Europeans were still God's civilised people and would come to the aid of Christian Ethiopia. But despite the blurring of its moral lens with the Italian invasion, the hermeneutic of the civilising mission still expressed the same paternalist sentiments as when it was invoked, in 1773, by Anthony Benezet, a French-born white abolitionist in North America. Scouring the Bible for testimony that might support the deliverance of enslaved Africans in North America by God's European children, Benezet found it in Psalms 68:31.⁵⁶

In sum, the political arguments over the Italy/Ethiopia conflict were predicated upon the question of Ethiopia's standard of civilisation. This question arose in the context of the nineteenth-century colonisation of the African continent, wherein both *realpolitik* and humanitarian concerns revolved around the issue of slavery and its abolition. In this global colonial context, issues of intervention and/or war combined and were mediated by a questioning of Ethiopia's sovereign status adjudicated in and outside the halls of the League by a standard of civilisation. And yet the legacies of Atlantic slavery were just as crucial to the transnational social movement that arose to defend Ethiopia's sovereignty. Here, while the relationship between slavery and Ethiopia remains core, the interpretation of this relationship shifts radically: as Mrs Earle intoned, it was not Europeans who as God's children would be saviours, but Ethiopians themselves – at home and abroad.

The second catechism of Psalms 68:31: African enslavement, liberation, and Ethiopianism

In the plantations of the Americas, enslaved Africans cultivated practices of creative survival, resistance, and insurrection behind the backs of the slave masters and overseers.⁵⁷ It was usually at night-time that these subversive practices were communally rehearsed in dance, drum, and prayer circles. In the plantations, different peoples necessarily interrelated so that the first 'syncretic' faiths were those that synthesised the cosmologies and practices of various African tribal and regional complexes in order to address the specific and extraordinary exigencies of a displaced and dehumanising existence. The causes of suffering and the sources of healing were apprehended through a relational rather than dualist apprehension of nature and society, profane and sublime knowledge, and the lands of the living (Guinea) and of the dead (the Americas) that were often connected through a veil of water. Inhabiting this

⁵⁶ Anthony Benezet, 'Letters of Anthony Benezet', *The Journal of Negro History*, 2:1 (1 January 1917), p. 85.

⁵⁷ The following paragraphs synthesise a set of arguments found in Clinton Hutton, *The Logic and Historic Significance of the Haitian Revolution and the Cosmological Roots of Haitian Freedom* (Kingston: Arawak, 2007); Dianne Stewart, *Three Eyes For the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures* (Kingston Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2003); St. Clair Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1970); Monica Schuler, 'Alas, Alas, Kongo': *A Social History of Indentured African Immigration Into Jamaica, 1841–1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The 'Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

cosmos were a set of interconnected spiritual agencies including ancestors, all in some way falling under the aegis of a begotten creating force, and which were all amenable to the act of intercession by earthly persons for the positive pursuit of communal healing or the negative pursuit of individual gain. The symbol for this place of intercession was often a cross, denoting a crossroads.

As Anthony Bogues notes, there are two sources to Ethiopianism: the syncretic faiths described above and the Bible.⁵⁸ In the Anglo-American world, Christianity was introduced to enslaved African peoples quite late in the day, but perhaps most substantially first of all on the North American mainland.⁵⁹ Once introduced, the Bible was interpreted to support the extant syncretic African faiths with their attendant social practices as well as, in the eyes of the followers, to make these faiths more powerful. However, judged to be ‘savage’ and (often correctly) incendiary by slave masters, the African matrix within which the Bible was situated had to be somewhat encrypted. This further syncretic – and inherently political – movement took place within what St Clair Drake has called the ‘invisible institution’, that is, the congregations on plantations presided over by fellow enslaved part-time preachers and prophets.⁶⁰

Various aspects of Christianity were henceforth woven through extant African faiths. For example, the notion of the Holy Ghost could be made to support the relational – rather than dualistic – apprehension of the material and spiritual dimensions. Baptism, a sanctified regeneration of life, was especially attractive due to its use of water. After all, water was a powerful medium of intercession between the material and spiritual worlds, and profane and sublime knowledge. The Atlantic was such a medium bar none, and would require the most powerful spiritual agency to pass through. Additionally, Pentecost, especially the ‘speaking in tongues’, affirmed the ongoing – and interventionist – nature of this dynamic relationship between dimensions. And in terms of cosmological narratives, whilst missionaries preferred to dwell on the message of Christ the redeemer, enslaved Africans – and then their emancipated descendents – also took great interest in the Old Testament story of enslavement and exodus of God’s chosen people. It so happened that during the Elizabethan era Africans had been commonly referred to as Ethiops, and this practice had been adopted for the King James translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Hence, the enslaved and their descendents interpreted the Biblical narrative as the ‘half not told’ (1 Kings 10:7) – *their* story of exile, enslavement, and self-redemption, the story of the Israelite Ethiopian-Africans.

Thus, under the missionary sign of the cross that implored sufferers to wait for the day of their death for redemption, Ethiopians in America smuggled that other symbol of living communal healing and sanctified justice – the African crossroads.⁶¹ Psalm 68:31 came to denote the key elements of these subversive (and often clandestine) syncretic maneuvers. ‘Princes coming out of Egypt’ expressed the movement out of bondage; ‘Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto God’ referred to a spiritual intercession that would support this liberatory, redemptive, and healing enterprise. Examples of the political utterance of this informal catechism of Psalms 68:31 by

⁵⁸ *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 19.

⁵⁹ See W. R. Scott, *Sons of Sheba’s Race: African-Americans and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935–41* (John Wiley & Sons, 1993), ch. 2.

⁶⁰ Drake, *The Redemption of Africa and Black Religion*, pp. 25–6; see also Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, ch. 5.

⁶¹ Stewart, *Three Eyes For the Journey*, pp. 168–9.

African-American preachers are plentiful and included references to the Haitian Revolution, Thomas Jefferson's racist *Notes on Virginia*, and the American Civil War.⁶² Such utterances announce the arrival of plantation faiths in the public realm, accompanied by a desire to be independent of the white American laity.

George Lisle not only set up the first independent Baptist church of its kind in Savannah in 1792; he also travelled forthwith to Jamaica to proselytise his Ethiopian Baptist faith.⁶³ Across the Anglo Caribbean enslaved peoples had undertaken the same syncretism of African faith systems (although with somewhat different African sources and combinations) to be practiced 'invisibly' within compounds or at night. In the decades preceding emancipation, a small and erratic flow of African Baptist preachers entered the region in the footsteps of Lisle, often with the initial (and contentious) help of the London Missionary Society. By the 1830s, a Native Baptist tradition was established in the declining plantations and new rural free-towns of Jamaica. Similar movements, albeit specific to their surroundings, peppered the Caribbean.

As Charles Price notes, Ethiopianism became publically politicised in Jamaica only with the founding, by Marcus Garvey, of the *Universal Negro Improvement Association* in 1914.⁶⁴ Indeed, it was primarily through the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) that Ethiopianism became the hermeneutic of a mass public-political movement of descendents of enslaved Africans across the Americas and especially in the US and the Caribbean. Garvey declared that, although God had no colour, humanity had been created in His image; therefore, it was necessary and prudent for those of African heritage to 'worship him through the spectacles of Ethiopia'.⁶⁵ The UNIA's national anthem was entitled 'Ethiopia Thou Land of Our Fathers' and Psalm 68:31 was the most popular biblical passage preached at meetings with its official UNIA catechism being: 'that negroes will set up their own government in Africa with rulers of their own race'.⁶⁶ Garvey's political inflection of Ethiopianism fed back into the preaching circuits of the Americas described above (and also further afield).⁶⁷

To summarise the argument so far, Ethiopianism emerged as a hermeneutic that allowed a vision of Pan-African liberation and healing adequate to challenge the global colonial order of slavery and differential racial rule. This interpretive logic, condensed into the catechism of Psalm 68:31, informed a transnational social movement that stretched across the pre- and post-emancipation plantation economies of the Americas.

The Great Depression of the 1930s badly affected Caribbean economies, prompting a collapse of export prices, cuts in wages, and declines in living standards.⁶⁸

⁶² See, for example, Robert Alexander Young, 'The Ethiopian Manifesto', in Sterling Stuckley (ed.), *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 30–8; David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal* (The Journal of Pan African Studies, 2009), available at: {<http://www.jpanafrican.com/ebooks/eBook%20David%20Walker%27s%20Appeal.pdf>}.

⁶³ Charles Reavis Price, 'Cleave to the Black: Expressions of Ethiopianism in Jamaica', *New West Indian Guide*, 77:1/2 (2003), p. 42.

⁶⁴ See in general, Price, 'Cleave to the Black'.

⁶⁵ Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey or Africa for the Africans; Two Vols in One*, ed. Amy Jacques Garvey (London: Frank Cass, 1967), vol. 1, p. 34.

⁶⁶ George M Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 92.

⁶⁷ Price, 'Cleave to the Black', pp. 52–4.

⁶⁸ For overviews, see W. Arthur Lewis, *Labour in the West Indies: The Birth of a Worker's Movement* (London: New Beacon Books, 1977); O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934–39* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1995).

Strikes and hunger marches had begun in 1934 but intensified from October 1935 once news of the Italian invasion arrived. The expanded horizon, afforded by Ethiopianism, enabled regional issues of self-governance and self-sufficiency to be politically apprehended as part of a global colonial war against African peoples at home and abroad. My primary research so far indicates that this phenomenon was widespread across the Anglo-Caribbean reaching, for example, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Barbados, Jamaica, British Guyana, and Trinidad. Due to space constraints I shall focus on the latter.

One of the most influential African syncretic faiths in Trinidad is Shango – also called Orisha – whose adherents often identify themselves as Yoruba or African people.⁶⁹ While the entry points of an African-syncretised Baptist faith into Trinidad are contested, Archbishop Barbara Grey-Burke provides a detailed narrative of the arrival of African-American peoples, brought to the colony by the British at the end of the American war of 1812–14. Known as ‘Merekens’, they included African Baptist preachers some of whom mingled and combined their Baptist faith with Shango/Orisha.⁷⁰ Sharing the common traits of African Baptism, the faith in Trinidad confirmed the agental nature of the Holy Spirit, for example, the pouring of the spirit into men and women at Pentecost.⁷¹ Rather than a symbol for ‘suffer now and be rewarded in heaven’ the ‘redemptive work’ of Christ on the cross provided ‘healing for the human body in answer to believing prayer’.⁷² Spiritual Baptism and Shango/Orisha were outlawed as savage (and incendiary) in 1921 along with the prohibition of music and drumming between ten in the evening and six in the morning.⁷³ Spiritual Baptism in Trinidad is still considered by its adherents to be an ‘African religion’ that articulates a liberation ethos.⁷⁴

By 1921, Garveyism had started to exert a strong influence on the Trinidadian Workingmens Association (TWA); indeed, the local UNIA branch and the TWA often shared officers, men, and women.⁷⁵ Despite a lull in the late 1920s, the early 1930s saw the Garveyite message of race consciousness taken up by ‘middle-class’ African Trinidadians who were attracted to the principle of economic self-sufficiency. In this way, ideas of race consciousness, economic advance, and political self-rule entwined.⁷⁶ These sentiments fed into the hunger marches and strikes of 1934 leading into 1935. And then news of the Italy/Ethiopia conflict arrived in the pages of

⁶⁹ Dale Bisnauth, *A History of Religions in the Caribbean* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1996), p. 172.

⁷⁰ B. Grey-Burke, *A Brief History of the Shouter Baptist Faith in Trinidad and Tobago* (Trinidad and Tobago: B. Grey-Burke, 2002), pp. 13–15; see also Wallace W. Zane, *Journeys to the Spiritual Lands: The Natural History of a West Indian Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 156–7; Donald Wood, *Trinidad in Transition: The Years After Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 67; James T Houk, *Spirits, Blood, and Drums: The Orisha Religion in Trinidad* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), pp. 71–5.

⁷¹ Grey-Burke, *History of the Shouter Baptist Faith*, p. 4; Eudora Thomas, *A History of the Shouter Baptists in Trinidad and Tobago* (Ithaca, NY: Calaloux Publications, 1987), p. 57.

⁷² Grey-Burke, *History of the Shouter Baptist Faith*, p. 4.

⁷³ Melville J. Herskovits and Frances S. Herskovits, *Trinidad Village* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1947), pp. 345–8.

⁷⁴ Thomas, *History of the Shouter Baptists*, p. 17; Grey-Burke, *History of the Shouter Baptist Faith*, pp. 15–16.

⁷⁵ Kelvin Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State: Trinidad 1917–1945* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press, University of the West Indies, 1994), pp. 21–2; Roy Darrow Thomas, *The Trinidad Labour Riots of 1937: Perspectives 50 Years Later* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies, 1987), p. 238.

⁷⁶ Singh, *Race and Class Struggles in a Colonial State*, pp. 151–3.

Garveyite and trade union newspapers including publications by Sylvia Pankhurst.⁷⁷ At this point, it was a Spiritual Baptist, Uriah Butler, who came to wield the most influence over the poor unemployed and working masses. Butler had modelled his mass meetings on Baptist gatherings.⁷⁸ Whilst it was certainly not the case that all of Butler's followers were Baptists, nor even card-carrying Garveyites (neither was Butler), Baptism and Garveyism nevertheless politicised the Ethiopianism of the poor masses by explicating Selassie I's struggle as part of their own domestic struggle for full liberation. Although undertaking fieldwork a few years later, the Herskovits – celebrated social anthropologists – capture this intersection in their observations of people of the village of Toco:

Biblical citations having to do with the final triumph of the meek fall frequently and easily from his lips when he discusses the case of the Shouters [Spiritual Baptists]. He moves from this to tell of the objectives of the Garvey movement or of the struggles of Haile Selassie against European powers, thus effecting a transfer to the broader, world-wide inter-racial situation.⁷⁹

Of the two, the Herskovits note, Selassie I was of greater import due to the fact that he was 'fighting the battle of the black people against the whites for the control of Africa'.⁸⁰

Hence, a few days after the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, longshoremen refused to unload Italian ships and consumers began to boycott Italian goods.⁸¹ On 10 October, one week after the invasion, a demonstration march proceeded to the Italian consulate in Port of Spain carrying the message, 'down with Mussolini!'⁸² Many other rallies followed.⁸³ A number of African Trinidadian Catholics rejected the Roman Catholic Church due to its blessing of Mussolini's invasion.⁸⁴ In early November, more than 2,500 people attended a commemoration service of the emperor's coronation.⁸⁵ The 'Daughters of Ethiopia' women's section of the national UNIA was revitalised in order to collect significant funds for Selassie I's armies, despite the ongoing pains of the Great Depression.⁸⁶ For example, a cheque for £463 was sent in March 1936 from the 'Trinidad public' to the Ethiopian minister in London for 'Red Cross work'.⁸⁷ Moreover, some African-Trinidadians started to identify themselves neither as West Indians or as British subjects but specifically as Ethiopians, or in general, Africans.⁸⁸ While much of these developments were visible primarily in the towns, by December disturbing stories were circulating amongst colonial elites that Yoruba incantations, drumming, singing, and animal sacrifices were being carried out in villages, interceding the spiritual agencies for the quickening of Ethiopian victory.⁸⁹

⁷⁷ Thomas, *The Trinidad Labour Riots of 1937*, p. 241.

⁷⁸ Frances Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad: The Socio-Political Legitimation of the Orisha and Spiritual Baptist Faith* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), p. 35.

⁷⁹ Herskovits and Herskovits, *Trinidad Village*, p. 186.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁸¹ Robert G. Weisbord, 'British West Indian Reactions to the Italian-Ethiopian War: An Episode in Pan-Africanism', *Caribbean Studies*, 10:1 (1970), p. 36; Kevin A Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad 1935–1936', in Bridget Brereton and Kevin A Yelvington (eds), *The Colonial Caribbean in Transition* (Kingston: Press University of the West Indies, 1999), p. 207.

⁸² Weisbord, 'Reactions to the Italian-Ethiopian War', p. 36.

⁸³ Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad', pp. 200, 207.

⁸⁴ Thomas, *The Trinidad Labour Riots of 1937*, p. 242.

⁸⁵ Weisbord, 'Reactions to the Italian-Ethiopian War', p. 37.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *The Trinidad Labour Riots of 1937*, p. 242; Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad', p. 213.

⁸⁷ Labour History Archive, Manchester WG/TRI/145, 'Cheque to British Labour Party' (18 March 1936).

⁸⁸ Yelvington, 'The War in Ethiopia and Trinidad', p. 200.

⁸⁹ Weisbord, 'Reactions to the Italian-Ethiopian War', p. 37.

In April 1937, with Selassie I now in exile in Bath, the Friends of Ethiopia Committee authorised Captain Cipriani – the prime advocate of self-rule at the time – to communicate to the colonial office and foreign secretary during his trip to London ‘our continued indignation over the treatment of Ethiopia and Ethiopians’.⁹⁰ Cipriani was also to urge the government to respect its obligations as a member of the League, to push for the full restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty and to agitate for increased representation of Trinidadians on their legislative council.⁹¹ Around this time, a telegram from the governor to the secretary of state for the Colonies recognised the continued emotional importance of Ethiopia to the poor masses.⁹² In June 1937, Uriah Butler began a new series of strikes, in September he was arrested, dismissed as a ‘religious fanatic’ and charged with sedition.⁹³ The arrest set off widespread rioting. During his trial, a lance corporal reported that in a public talk Butler had articulated the exploitation by oil companies of workers thus: ‘it is the principles of enslavement and it is for you to set yourself free. The black man in Trinidad is the same as in Ethiopia.’⁹⁴ Subsequently, Butler delivered a speech from the witness box that painted the following image:

if you will just take a walk to Vessigny and Sobo with its picture of desolation, with houses and gardens laid low, you will forget all about a strike of Trinidad workers at least for the moment; for these eyes hath seen a picture that will make you imagine for the moment that you are in some part of Fascist-destroyed Ethiopia with houses and vegetation laid low.⁹⁵

The Trinidadian example demonstrates how Ethiopianism enabled African-Caribbean peoples to politically articulate the intimate relationship between their own struggles over the socioeconomic legacies of slavery, their desire for meaningful self-rule, and the redemption of Ethiopian sovereignty. While dismissing Ethiopianism as nonsense rather than as an ‘other-wise’; sensibility, British authorities nevertheless apprehended its insurrectionary character when mobilised to inform a transnational social movement. Witness, for example, the governor of the Windward Islands comments in November 1935 to Malcolm Macdonald, secretary of state for the Colonies: ‘[if] the Abyssinians achieved a similar success to that of 1896 [Adwa], the repercussions might be more dangerous than they will be if Italy succeeds in annexing Abyssinia.’⁹⁶ Around the same time, Malcolm Macdonald forwarded dispatches to representatives in East and West Africa warning them that Britain had failed to make clear to its native populations that it viewed the Italian attack in the gravest light.⁹⁷ By early 1936, the Admiralty was alerting the Colonial Office that naval units in the Caribbean were possibly insufficient to efficiently attend to uprisings across the regions, a logistical problem made worse by the ‘present emergency arising from the Italo-Abyssinian war’.⁹⁸

⁹⁰ National Archives UK, Colonial Office (CO) 318/425/15, Friends of Ethiopia Committee, ‘Resolutions’ (1937).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² CO 295/599/13, Governor of Trinidad, ‘Telegram to Secretary of State for the Colonies No. 117’ (1937).

⁹³ Henry, *Reclaiming African Religions in Trinidad*, p. 35.

⁹⁴ W. Richard Jacobs (ed.), *Butler Versus the King: Riots and Sedition in 1937* (Port of Spain: Key Caribbean Publications, 1976).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ CO 321/363/13, Governor of Windward Islands, ‘Report to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 12th Nov’ (1935).

⁹⁷ Weisbord, ‘Reactions to the Italian-Ethiopian War’, p. 38.

⁹⁸ CO 321/367/7, J. S. Barnes, ‘Letter to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 11th Feb’ (1936).

Conclusion

The two catechisms of Psalms 68:31 that I used to introduce this article express two different hermeneutics through which the Italy/Ethiopia conflict was apprehended at the time. Nevertheless, both have genealogies that are entangled with Atlantic slavery and African colonisation as signal projects of colonial-modernity. One hermeneutic is a civilising mission, expressing the hope that Europeans – God’s children – will act upon their remit to save Ethiopians/Africans from themselves and from degenerate European brethren. The genealogy of this interpretive logic is entangled with the regulation of colonial difference and its legal facilitation of intervention in and/or war on quasi-sovereign African polities. The other hermeneutic, Ethiopianism, expresses the desire for self-liberation of Africans from their domination by slave masters and their empires. The genealogy of this interpretive logic is entangled with transnational social forces that, through a Pan-African optic, seek to disassemble the legal, political, and cognitive mechanisms of colonial difference so as to defend the full sovereignty of Ethiopia and Ethiopians, at home and abroad.

These hermeneutics, I have argued, speak to the key cognitive and substantive coordinates of colonial-modernity that frame the Italy/Ethiopian conflict. In this framework, war, empire, and intervention are not mechanisms of ordering that can be segregated into premodern and modern machineries. Rather, they are all contemporaneous techniques of colonial-modern rule that work variously to produce and police a colonial difference between sovereign and quasi-sovereign entities. Moreover, sovereign and transnational social forces variously populate this global colonial order seeking to uphold or undermine the rule of racialised difference. In resistance to this rule, and against the expectations of many Eurocentric grand narratives of globalisation, transnational social forces can even support the principle of sovereignty.

The provocation of this article has been that, when mobilised to address the concerns of IR, sociologies of modernity usually identify only a provincial drama amongst a ‘family of nations’ as their departure point, whereas sociologies of colonial-modernity identify, instead, a global rule of racialised difference. The English industrial revolution, Westphalia and/or the Holy Alliance are provincial dramas that are already entangled within deeper determining structures of global colonial rule. Hence sociological conceptions of global modernity – including the conceptualising of the relationship between intervention, sovereignty, and transnational social forces – must be cultivated from colonial-modern departure points, as I have demonstrated through my decolonising of the Italy/Ethiopia conflict. The importance of this conflict lies in the fact that it is not just a case-study: embodying the nadir of the interwar crisis, the question of Ethiopian sovereignty is immanent to the very self-conception of IR as a discipline. Through this conflict two catechisms of Psalms 68:31 clashed: a standard of civilisation determined by slavery, and an ethos of liberation determined by enslavement. There is more than just one great debate to be had over this crisis.