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Empire, Memory and Civic Formation: Comparative Perspectives on Greco-Roman, Biblical and Postcolonial African Models of Citizenship

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Abstract

By means of social memory theory and postcolonial analysis as interpretive frameworks, this article examines citizenship, civic formation, and corruption through Luke's Gospel and postcolonial African political experience. Moving beyond approaches that explain corruption primarily as a failure of individual leadership or virtue, it asks: How are citizens formed to understand public office, political responsibility, and the expectations they place on leaders? How does collective memory shape what communities demand and tolerate? The article argues that Luke's reversal traditions function as portable scripts through which communities

under Roman rule could imagine alternative forms of civic life. Particular attention is given to Luke 22:25 and its rejection of *euergetes*, which challenges the benefaction system through which elites converted wealth into political status. Bringing this Lukan civic imagination into conversation with postcolonial Africa, the article examines how memories of colonial administration, independence, and liberation continue to shape citizenship and public expectations. It argues that corruption should be approached not only as a problem of leadership but also as a question of civic formation and social memory.

Keywords: Citizenship, Civic Formation, Corruption, Social Memory, Luke-Acts, *Euergetism*, Postcolonial Africa

1. Introduction

1.1 Three Genealogies of a Single Word

Three distinct histories converge whenever an African commentator complains that a minister has forgotten that public office is a public trust. One history runs back through the Greek polis and the Roman municipality, where citizenship named a bundle of obligations and honours distributed unequally among those who shared a cult and a descent. A second runs through the New Testament, and particularly through Luke-Acts, where a small provincial movement borrowed the vocabulary of civic belonging and turned it against the arrangements that had produced it. A third runs through colonial administration and its afterlife, where a European legal order divided the governed into citizens with rights and subjects with customs, and where independence inherited the division rather than dissolving it.

These genealogies sit side by side in African public life. They are also entangled. The language of stewardship that African churches deploy against corrupt officials is Lukan; the institutional forms those officials occupy are colonial; the honorific economy that rewards a politician for roofing a village school is closer to ancient *euergetism* than to anything in Weber. To treat any one of the three as self-sufficient is to misdescribe the problem.

This article takes the entanglement seriously and asks a single question of all three traditions: what kind of citizen does each of them form, and by what means? The emphasis on means matters. Political theory tends to describe citizenship as a status or a set of entitlements. The more interesting question, and the one this article pursues, concerns formation: the process by which a population comes to hold expectations of officeholders and of itself, and the cultural materials through which those expectations are transmitted across generations.

1.2 The Argument

The thesis is twofold. First, anti-corruption discourse in postcolonial Africa has been dominated by leadership-virtue framings, and those framings have underperformed because corruption is a problem of civic formation and public memory rather than a shortage of individual moral supply. Research based on Kenya and Uganda made the structural point two decades ago: where

systemic corruption operates as a collective-action problem, individuals who expect everyone else to remain corrupt experience personal integrity as costly and futile, so that reform programmes premised on principal-agent logic address the wrong difficulty (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2013). The point has been reinforced, uncomfortably, by experimental work. In Lagos, exposure to five different anti-corruption messages largely failed to reduce willingness to pay a bribe in a real-money game, and among respondents already convinced that corruption was pervasive, several messages increased it (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022a). A companion household survey of 2,400 Lagos residents found that four of the five messages reduced agreement that citizens have a duty to pay tax by six to seven percentage points (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022b). Campaigns designed to produce better citizens produced more cynical ones.

Second, Luke's reversal material is interesting for this problem, but not as a leadership manual. Its interest lies in what it shows about how a subordinated community under empire assembled an alternative civic imagination out of remembered narrative. Luke does not legislate. He furnishes a set of scenes that a community can carry, rehearse and apply, and in rehearsing them the community acquires a description of legitimate authority that the surrounding political economy did not supply. That is a claim about mechanism, and social memory theory is the apparatus for stating it.

The two halves of the thesis meet at a practical point. If the Lukan material works by forming a public rather than by improving a leader, then the contemporary translation of that material belongs in civic formation rather than in executive ethics training. The paper argues for that relocation.

1.3 Scope, Sources and Method

Method here is comparative and critical rather than exhaustive. Three bodies of scholarship are brought into contact: classical work on Greek and Roman citizenship and benefaction; exegetical and empire-critical work on Luke-Acts; and political-theoretical and empirical work on citizenship, belonging and corruption in postcolonial Africa. Social memory theory supplies the connective tissue.

Selection has been governed by argumentative need. Not every Lukan parable appears, and the article does not attempt an inventory of African citizenship regimes. Where cited studies point in different directions, the disagreement is staged rather than smoothed: the dispute over whether Luke-Acts accommodates or subverts Rome is presented as live, because it is; the dispute over whether Ubuntu can bear political weight is presented as unresolved, because it is.

Three limitations. The article works from published scholarship, not from primary epigraphic or survey data. Its African material is weighted towards Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, where the literatures are thickest. Its comparative claims are interpretive; the propositions generated in section 7 are offered as testable, not as tested.

2. Empire and the Formation of Publics: The Greco-Roman Civic Order

2.1 The Polis: Citizenship as Shared Obligation before Shared Power

Modern readers approach Greek citizenship through Aristotle, for whom the citizen is the one who shares in judgement and office. Josine Blok has argued that this definition reflects a philosophical programme rather than

Athenian practice, and that it produces an artificially narrow picture: it excludes women, who were never candidates for magistracy, yet who were unambiguously members of the community. On Blok's reconstruction, Athenian citizenship consisted in a share in *hiera kai hestia*, the sacred things owed to the gods and the right conduct owed to fellow members, transmitted through legitimate descent (Blok, 2017). Membership was liturgical before it was electoral.

This matters for the comparison that follows, because it locates the formative work of ancient citizenship in ritual participation rather than in deliberation. Athenians were made into Athenians by sacrificing together, not primarily by voting together. Civic virtue, on this account, was less a disposition cultivated in the assembly than a competence acquired in the procession.

Blok's reading risks dissolving the political content of citizenship into religion, and the assembly plainly did decisive work. The objection has force. But the two accounts differ in their consequences for the present argument. If citizenship is constituted by shared participation in a ritual life, then the transmission mechanism is repetition, and the analytic category needed is memory. That is exactly the category this article will require.

2.2 Rome: Citizenship as Graded Legal Status

Roman citizenship worked differently. It was portable, extendable, and above all graded. Latin right, Junian Latin status, freedman status, full *civitas*: these were rungs, and movement between them was a political instrument. Myles Lavan's probabilistic reconstruction of the spread of citizenship between 14 and 212 CE concludes that it is extremely unlikely that more than a third of the free provincial population held Roman citizenship on the eve of Caracalla's universal grant (Lavan, 2016). For most provincials most of the time, citizenship was something other people had.

Acts takes that stratification for granted and exploits it narratively. Paul's claim of Roman birth in Acts 22 stops a flogging, and the tribune's admission that he purchased his own citizenship at great cost registers the difference between bought and inherited standing. Peter van Minnen has argued that Paul's status is historically unremarkable: descent from a manumitted ancestor was the ordinary route to citizenship for a Jew of the eastern provinces, and there is no need to reach for extraordinary explanations (van Minnen, 1995). The argument is persuasive precisely because it is deflationary. Luke's Paul is not an anomaly but a case study in how imperial status worked, and the narrative makes the point by showing what the status buys: procedural protection, and access to a hearing.

Rome thus offers a second model of formation. Athenians were formed by shared cult; provincial Romans, by a legal order that treated people differently according to a status most could not attain. Its lesson is that standing before the law is a distributed privilege rather than a common condition. The postcolonial resonance is not accidental, and section 5 returns to it.

2.3 Euergetism and the Purchase of Civic Consent

The third structural feature of the Greco-Roman civic order is the one that bears most directly on Luke. Cities in the Greek East ran substantially on elite munificence: buildings, festivals, distributions and endowments, given by wealthy

citizens and repaid in honorific decrees, statues and titles. Arjan Zuiderhoek's study of Asia Minor argues against reading this as welfare. Cities had tax revenues; the donations were too irregular and too concentrated in cultural and religious display to have functioned as poverty relief. Euergetism was an ideological ritual through which a narrowing oligarchy legitimised its dominance while continuing to speak the language of civic equality (Zuiderhoek, 2009).

Note the mechanism. Benefaction converted private wealth into public standing, and it did so through a public act of remembering: the inscription, the statue base, the annually recurring festival that carried the donor's name. Euergetism was a memory technology as much as a distributive practice, and this is why it belongs in an article about civic formation. It taught a city, year after year, who its benefactors were and what gratitude was owed them.

Imperial cult worked by the same grammar at a higher register. Simon Price's study of Asia Minor established that emperor worship was integrated into the ritual structure of civic life rather than bolted onto it, and Philip Harland's work on Ephesian associations shows the Sebastoi embedded in mysteries, processions and sacrificial meals, sustained through the same networks of benefaction that supported local honorands (Price, 1984; Harland, 1996). Harland's finding is the sharper one for present purposes, because it refuses the convenient separation between political compliance and genuine devotion. Honour flowed upward through a continuous chain from local donor to provincial elite to emperor, and it was religious all the way up.

Luke's Gospel was composed inside that chain. Halvor Moxnes's study of economic relations in Luke reads the Gospel's conflicts over wealth as conflicts within a patron-client order in which resources circulated as obligation rather than as exchange (Moxnes, 1988), and the reading of Luke 18:18-23 against ancient patronage by Uwaegbute and Odo shows the demands such an order placed on wealthy actors (Uwaegbute & Odo, 2021).

2.4 Luke 22:25 and the Unresolved Question of Luke's Politics

Against that background, Luke 22:25 is not a general homily about humility. "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors." The word is *euergetai*. Jesus names the honorific title that the benefaction system existed to confer, and he names it in the same breath as domination. The sentence identifies the two as a single practice.

David Lull's reading of Luke 22:24-30 establishes that the passage does not abolish benefaction; it reconstitutes it as benefaction without domination, so that greatness is measured by what power accomplishes for others rather than by the honour it returns (Lull, 1986). Peter Nelson's analysis of the flow of thought in the pericope reaches a compatible conclusion: the disciples' dispute over precedence is answered by relocating the measure of leadership from rank to service (Nelson, 1991). Etukumana reads the passage as subversive rhetoric aimed at the community's own internal ordering, which sharpens the point: the target is not only Gentile kings but the reproduction of their logic inside the group (Etukumana, 2024).

Whether that amounts to a politics is the long-running dispute. Steve Walton's survey of the field distinguishes five

positions: Luke as political apology directed at Roman officials on behalf of the church; Luke as ecclesial apology persuading Christians that cooperation with Rome is legitimate, as Walaskay argued; Luke as legitimization for believers of Roman standing, following Esler; Luke as equipment for Christian conduct under imperial pressure, following Cassidy; and Luke as politically disinterested. Walton rejects the first two and settles on critical distance: cooperation where the empire acts justly, faithful witness where it does not (Walton, 2002).

Kavin Rowe's position is more precisely drawn and, in this author's judgement, the most defensible of the available options. Rowe argues that Acts narrates Christianity as an alternative total way of life that runs counter to Greco-Roman life-patterns, while deliberately eliminating the possibility of construing that alternative as a bid for the Roman state. His formulation is compressed: new culture, yes; coup, no (Rowe, 2009). On the imperial cult specifically, he treats the relationship as genuinely difficult rather than obvious, and proceeds by close attention to particular formulations such as Acts 10:36 rather than by cataloguing shared vocabulary (Rowe, 2005).

The counter-position deserves its weight. Judy Diehl's survey of anti-imperial readings notes that a significant body of scholarship doubts whether coded anti-imperial rhetoric exists in the Gospels and Acts at all, and that the method has a besetting weakness: shared vocabulary between Christian and imperial discourse is easy to find and hard to interpret, since both drew on the same Hellenistic honorific repertoire (Diehl, 2011). A title Luke shares with the emperor may signal competition, or may signal nothing more than the available Greek.

Jeremy Punt offers the most useful way through. Empire, he argues, is conceptual before it is material, sustained through negotiated relationships rather than force alone, and New Testament texts display both subversion and attraction, frequently at once: those on the underside of imperial power avail themselves of its structures and rhetoric even while contesting them (Punt, 2012). This is not a compromise between the two camps but a better description of the evidence. Luke can name *euergetism* as domination in chapter 22 and still deploy Roman citizenship as a narrative resource in Acts 22. Amanda Miller's application of James Scott's hidden transcripts to Luke describes the same doubleness from the other direction, identifying tension between passages that accommodate Roman rule and poetic or parabolic texts announcing reversal (Miller, 2014b; Scott, 1990; Horsley, 2004).

The payoff for this article is not a verdict on Luke's political intentions. It is a methodological one. If empire operates conceptually, through the distribution of honour and the management of gratitude, then resistance to it must also operate conceptually, through the redistribution of honour and the reconstruction of what a community remembers as admirable. That is a memory problem, and it is where the argument turns next.

3. Memory, Narrative and the Making of Citizens

3.1 Halbwachs and the Social Frameworks of Remembering

Maurice Halbwachs's proposition is deceptively simple: memory is collective and is constructed within social frameworks, so that what a group recalls is governed by what its present arrangements make recallable. Dennis

Duling's survey traces the route from neuropsychological findings that memories are reconstructed rather than retrieved intact, through Halbwachs, to Werner Kelber's work on orality and Gospel transmission, and lands on a moderate constructionism that refuses both naive historical confidence and corrosive scepticism (Duling, 2011).

Jan Assmann's refinement is the one this article most needs. He distinguishes communicative memory, the shared knowledge of a society in a given epoch, carried in living interaction and bounded by the lifespan of participants, from cultural memory, which extends across centuries and requires institutions, canons and techniques of interpretation. The transition between them occurs when a community moves from ritual to textual continuity (Assmann, 2011). Applied to early Christianity, the distinction names a real historical passage: a movement whose founder's sayings circulated in living speech becomes a movement whose sayings are fixed, copied and expounded, and the mechanism by which it forms its members changes accordingly.

Danièle Hervieu-Léger's account of religion as a chain of memory extends the point into the sociology of tradition, and Jakub Urbaniak's application to Christian history makes the argument that premodern Christian societies functioned as societies of memory in which the Christ-event supplied an authoritative reference point from which the present was continuously reinterpreted, until modernity fractured that continuity into competing memories and left a condition he calls cultural amnesia (Urbaniak, 2015). The diagnosis is arguable in its details and rather sweeping in its periodisation. Its analytic value survives the quibble: it identifies religious tradition as a formation technology, and identifies the loss of a shared reference point as a formation failure.

3.2 The Memory Turn in Gospel Scholarship, and Its Critics

Social memory theory entered New Testament studies through the collection Kirk and Thatcher edited in 2005, and Chris Keith's assessment of the first decade reviews its debts to Halbwachs, Assmann and Barry Schwartz while acknowledging that the approach has attracted as much resistance as adoption (Kirk & Thatcher, 2005; Keith, 2015). The resistance is worth stating at full strength, because it bears on whether this article's central mechanism holds.

Ernest Van Eck has pressed the strongest objection. Memory studies, he argues, amount to form criticism in new clothing. They mischaracterise the criteria approach they displace, which works by redaction criticism on written texts rather than by reconstructing oral forms. They posit interpretations of interpretations, chasing an oral tradition behind the text that is by definition inaccessible. And they commit the circularity they diagnose, treating Gospel narratives as present-shaped interpretive frameworks while claiming to do history. Van Eck concludes that the approach has produced few examples demonstrating its superiority and tends towards historical scepticism (Van Eck, 2015).

The objection is well aimed at one use of memory theory and misses another. As a method for recovering what Jesus said, memory theory is indeed vulnerable to Van Eck's charge; it trades one set of unverifiable inferences for another. As an account of what a text does to the community that keeps it, the charge does not bite, because no historical reconstruction is being attempted. The present article uses

memory theory exclusively in the second register. The question is not what lies behind Luke 14 but what Luke 14 does to a group that rehearses it.

Van Eck's own practice supports the distinction. His study of the parable of the minas sets Luke's version beside the two accounts in Josephus of Archelaus's journey to Rome, and reads the three as competing memories of a single episode, shaped by the identities of the communities that transmitted them (Van Eck, 2011b). That is memory theory doing exactly the work this article claims for it: not recovering an event, but showing how a group's version of an event encodes its position. The same scholar's social-scientific reading of the minas, which construes the third servant's refusal as protest against elite extraction, gains force when placed alongside it, because protest is intelligible only from a located memory of who took what from whom (Van Eck, 2011a).

3.3 Parables as Portable Civic Scripts

Here is the claim this section exists to defend. Luke's parables function as portable civic scripts: compact, memorable scenes that a community can carry, rehearse and apply to situations their author never envisaged, and that in the rehearsing supply a description of legitimate and illegitimate authority.

Three features of the material support the claim. The first is formal. Michael Rindge characterises Luke's parables as narratives of subversion and imagination whose rhetoric unsettles familiar expectation and draws hearers into imagined worlds where accepted arrangements of wealth and honour become questionable (Rindge, 2014). Scenes travel better than propositions, and scenes that surprise travel best of all.

The second is performative. David Seal's performance-critical analysis of the banquet parable recovers its oral and dramatic features, showing how the shock of invited elites refusing the feast and peripheral people taking their places was heightened in delivery (Seal, 2018). A text designed for performance is a text designed for repetition, and repetition is the elementary operation of communicative memory.

Third, and decisively, the material is cognitive in its operation. Bonnie Howe and Eve Sweetser's analysis of the Samaritan narrative demonstrates how readers construct moral evaluations from the text's arrangement of actors, expectations and surprising behaviour (Howe & Sweetser, 2021). The parable does not state a rule; it trains a judgement. Ruben Zimmermann's account of the same passage as ethopoietic makes the complementary point that seeing suffering and becoming a moral subject are inseparable operations in the narrative, so that the story works on perception before it works on decision (Zimmermann, 2008).

Put together, these give a mechanism. A parable furnishes a community with a scene, a set of roles, and a disturbed expectation. Over repeated telling, the scene becomes a template against which new situations are measured. Ryan Schellenberg's reading of the prudent steward shows the template doing contested work: the narrative's unresolved question about whose interests the steward finally serves forces audiences to adjudicate rather than apply (Schellenberg, 2008). That is formation, and it is formation of a specifically civic kind, because the questions being adjudicated are questions about entrusted power.

The same analysis applies to public memory outside the

text, which is why the concept transfers to section 5. Terence Ranger's account of the hardening of Zimbabwean nationalist historiography into patriotic history traces how a state narrowed a plural memory of the liberation war into an official script that divided the nation into patriots and sell-outs (Ranger, 2004). A comparative study of Nigeria, Mali, Rwanda and South Africa argues that post-conflict states routinely mishandle collective memory, pairing amnesty with selective amnesia in ways that defeated groups experience as confirmation of continuing marginalisation (Iroanya, Nguluwe & Ndapulamo, 2020). Scripts form publics whether or not anyone intends them to. The question for any community is which scripts it is running.

4. Lukan citizenship: Reversal, Restitution and the Reordered Public

4.1 The Magnificat: A Civic Charter in the Mouth of a Slave

Luke's Gospel opens its political account before Jesus speaks. Mary's song announces a God who has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly, and Raquel Lettsome's reading insists that the singer's self-designation as *doule* be heard with its full weight of enslavement rather than softened into pious self-effacement. Read that way, the song performs a transformation of imposed subordination into a site of dignity and theological speech (Lettsome, 2021).

The civic content is easy to miss because the idiom is liturgical. But the verbs are constitutional. Thrones are vacated, the hungry are filled, the rich are sent away. This is a description of a reordered public, spoken by a person whose legal standing in the Greco-Roman world would have been property rather than membership. Where Athenian citizenship ran through legitimate descent and Roman citizenship through graded status, Luke's opening song locates civic standing in divine regard for the lowly, and it does so in the voice of someone both systems excluded.

Paul Hertig's reading of the Nazareth proclamation as a jubilee-shaped mission extends the pattern from song to programme, binding divine favour to the reordering of relationships that produced exclusion (Hertig, 1998). A Nigerian contextual reading of the same passage draws out its implication for ethnic minorities deprived of representation and opportunity, concluding that restoration requires participation and empowerment rather than sympathy (Uwaegbute, 2019). Both readings converge on a claim about civic formation: the audience is being taught to recognise a political arrangement rather than to anticipate a consolation.

4.2 Seating politics: Luke 14 and the Constitution of the Table

If the Magnificat states the principle, Luke 14 supplies the procedure. Willi Braun's study of feasting and social rhetoric establishes that the ancient meal was a ranked institution in which placement encoded standing and invitation encoded expected return (Braun, 1995). To tell guests to take the lower place and hosts to invite those who cannot reciprocate is to legislate against the mechanism by which elites converted hospitality into obligation.

Amanda Miller's analysis of Luke's seating charts reads the chapter as an ethics of wealth and reversal in which the arrangement of bodies at a meal is the arrangement of a small polity (Miller, 2014a). The point can be put more

sharply than the literature usually puts it. Luke 14 is a constitutional text. It specifies who is admitted, on what terms, and what admission may be exchanged for, and its answer to the last question is nothing. A table at which invitation cannot be repaid is a table that has abolished clientage.

The connection to euergetism is direct and, in this author's view, under-exploited by commentators who read the chapter as an etiquette lesson. Zuiderhoek's benefactors gave in expectation of honorific return, and the return was the point (Zuiderhoek, 2009). Luke 14 attacks the return. Set beside Luke 22:25, where the title *euergetes* is named as the honour that domination collects, the two passages form a single argument: the benefaction economy is a technique for converting resources into standing, and the community Luke is forming is to refuse the conversion.

Nigerian narratological work on Luke's poverty parables reaches a compatible conclusion from a different direction, finding in them a mandate for institutional social action rather than discretionary charity (Adewale, 2021). Discretionary charity preserves the donor's standing; institutional obligation dissolves it.

4.3 Zacchaeus: Restitution as a Civic Act

Luke 19 gives the reversal a legal form. Zacchaeus is a chief toll collector, which is to say a beneficiary of the fiscal apparatus of Roman Judaea, and his response to Jesus is neither remorse nor almsgiving but a quantified programme: half of his goods to the poor, and fourfold repayment to anyone he has defrauded. Motuku and Van Eck read this through post-apartheid South African experience as an economic-justice paradigm in which reconciliation requires addressing the benefits derived from an oppressive structure rather than restoring interpersonal goodwill (Motuku & Van Eck, 2024).

The category that fits the episode is restitution, and restitution is a civic act rather than a private one. It concedes that a wrong was structural, that its proceeds are identifiable, and that the identifiable proceeds are owed back. Private repentance changes a man's standing before God; fourfold repayment changes the distribution of property in a town.

Read against the background of section 2, the significance is sharper still. Zacchaeus's wealth came from an imperial revenue system, and his restitution runs in the opposite direction to euergetism. The benefactor gives from surplus and collects honour; Zacchaeus gives from proceeds and collects nothing. Luke has constructed the exact inverse of the civic transaction his readers knew. Acts extends the inversion into a standing arrangement, with goods held in common and distribution made according to need, which is one of the practices Rowe has in view when he describes the movement as an alternative total way of life rather than a political programme (Rowe, 2009).

4.4 Stewardship, Tenancy and the Limits of Entrusted Office

Luke's parables of management supply the theory of office that the restitution scene assumes. In Luke 12:42-48 the steward holds genuine authority and remains answerable both to the one who entrusted it and to those in his care, so that negligence and self-indulgence are breaches of trust rather than administrative lapses (Faber, 2023). Luke 16 complicates the picture. Landry and May read the prudent steward's debt reductions as an attempt to restore honour,

situating the decisions within an economy where reputation and obligation were convertible (Landry & May, 2000); Barbaglia reads the passage as instruction concerning unjust wealth and conversion away from its idolatrous claim (Barbaglia, 2025); Burkett reads the reductions as a prudent use of mammon that creates relationships outlasting office (Burkett, 2018). Jinyoung Song's socio-economic reading situates the steward within structures of debt and dependence in which economic decisions generate social capital (Song, 2019).

These readings are not reconcilable, and the article does not pretend otherwise. What they share is more instructive than what divides them: all four treat office as temporary, resources as entrusted, and the steward's position as one that cannot be converted into property. E.A. David's caution against moral exemplarism is the necessary corrective at this point, since narrative commendation of one aspect of a character's conduct does not license admiration of the character (David, 2023). A Nigerian reading of the same parable in a context where corrupt practice risks social normalisation makes the stakes of that distinction concrete: where cleverness is already the dominant idiom of public advancement, an indiscriminating reading of Luke 16 supplies theological cover for fraud (Silas, 2020).

The tenants of Luke 20 show the failure mode. Uyovwiewovwe's reading of the passage against Nigerian church leadership describes custodians who begin to behave as proprietors, converting responsibility into private gain (Uyovwiewovwe, 2020). The parable's structure makes the point that the tenants' error is categorical rather than merely greedy: they have misidentified what kind of relationship they stand in. Simon Gathercole's reading of the minas cautions against a comparable misidentification in the interpreter, arguing that the parable engages Roman patterns of kingship and should not be reduced to an illustration of eschatological delay (Gathercole, 2024). The nobleman in that story is not a straightforward figure of divine legitimacy, and a community trained on it learns to interrogate how authority was acquired before assessing how it is used. Ottuh's reading of Luke 16:1-15 as a resource against corruption in Nigeria makes the institutional translation explicit, connecting faithful stewardship to answerability for resources (Ottuh, 2014).

4.5 Who counts: Marginal Figures as Civic Judges

Luke's most distinctive formal device is the relocation of moral authority to figures without standing. The woman of Luke 7:36-50 enters an elite male dining space under a moral label and leaves it as the passage's interpretive centre; Obamakin's Nigerian and British feminist reading recovers her embodied action from hypersexualised interpretation and reads it as prophetically significant (Obamakin, 2023). Pillay's reading of the same episode against patriarchal structures makes the command to see this woman into a challenge to habits of civic invisibility (Pillay, 2005). Maly's older survey of women in Luke established the pattern across the Gospel (Maly, 1980), and Chung's postcolonial feminist reading extends it to women situated within migration and cultural exclusion in Asian contexts (Chung, 2018).

The widow of Luke 18 makes the political content unmistakable. Wendy Cotter reads her persistence as a disruption of expected female deference that turns a powerless litigant into the figure who exposes judicial

failure (Cotter, 2005). Curkpatrick argues that the parable carries a prophetic demand for social transformation because the widow's insistence makes neglected justice visible (Curkpatrick, 2003). Ellison's norm-theory analysis describes a woman violating gendered expectations in a masculinised arena and persisting despite sanction (Ellison, 2025). Potgieter reads the same passage through resilience, which usefully shifts attention from the widow's virtue to the conditions of her endurance (Potgieter, 2023). A Zimbabwean case study of Methodist practice applies the passage to widows whose inheritance rights remain vulnerable despite legal protection, and the gap it identifies between law and experienced justice is precisely the gap the parable dramatises (Masvotore, 2024).

Ethnic boundaries receive the same treatment in the Samaritan material. Keddie's analysis shows the Samaritan's narrative role unsettling established classifications of neighbour and outsider (Keddie, 2020); Ryan's reassessment warns against readings that reproduce antagonistic stereotypes rather than interrogating them (Ryan, 2021); Yoon insists that the story's force depends on registering the historical hostility it asks hearers to overcome (Yoon, 2025). Nigerian application to Christian-Muslim coexistence shows the script in contemporary use against ethno-religious manipulation (Atowoju, Adimula & Jimoh, 2024).

4.6 What Kind of Citizen Does Luke Form?

An answer is now available, and it is more specific than the leadership literature has generally allowed.

Luke forms a citizen who reads authority backwards, from its effects on those least able to reciprocate. That is the operation performed by the widow, the Samaritan, the woman with the ointment, Lazarus at the gate. Bauckham showed that the rich man and Lazarus borrows recognisable narrative patterns and then redirects them towards the ethical failure of proximity without obligation (Bauckham, 1991). Hock located the story inside a wider ancient criticism of insulated wealth, with the Lucianic figure of Micyllus as the closest parallel (Hock, 1987). Bredenhof's study of what Lazarus signifies across Luke-Acts keeps the figure from collapsing into an instrument for condemning affluence (Bredenhof, 2020), and Szkredka names the failure precisely: postmortem punishment falls on suffering that was visible and unanswered (Szkredka, 2019).

Luke forms a citizen who treats office as revocable trust. That is the operation of the stewardship material, and of the tenants.

Luke forms a citizen who refuses the honour economy. That is the operation of Luke 14 and Luke 22:25, and it is the most politically demanding of the three, because it requires declining goods that the surrounding society regards as legitimate rewards.

And Luke forms a citizen who expects reversal without being permitted to await it passively. Ndekha's panegyric reading of the Sermon on the Plain in Malawi, where blessings on the poor and woes on the rich confront inequality, cronyism and nepotism, shows the rhetoric functioning as present-tense praise and blame rather than deferred compensation (Ndekha, 2020). Kim's study of the little ones in Luke 10:21 widens the reversal beyond material redress to the distribution of recognised knowledge, undermining monopolies of intellectual prestige (Kim, 2023). Mugabe's Zimbabwean reading of the rich fool and Jatau's study of greed in the same parable both refuse to let

abundance stand as evidence of successful life (Mugabe, 2014; Jatau, 2025), as does the Nigerian reading that connects the barn-builder to contemporary materialism (Ngele, Uwaegbute & Odo, 2017). Burke's account of the father in Luke 15 as prodigal in his own right, absorbing shame rather than enforcing honour, shows restoration taking priority over the preservation of standing (Burke, 2013), and Lee's cultural analysis supplies the kinship and inheritance conventions that make the father's conduct as shocking as it was (Lee, 2023).

Two things this citizen is not. Not a subject, since the whole apparatus trains judgement rather than compliance, and Nyiawung and Van Eck's African hermeneutic reading of Luke 9:18-22 shows leadership itself being clarified through conflict and refusal of status-driven expectation rather than through deference (Nyiawung & Van Eck, 2013). And not a client, since the refusal of reciprocal invitation in Luke 14 removes the transaction on which clientage runs. Motuku's anti-imperial reading of Luke's attention to the margins, set in a world of concentrated land and political authority, describes the conditions under which such a refusal would have been intelligible (Motuku, 2025). Gosnell's account of the ethics of valuing others in Luke identifies the underlying moral logic: conduct is evaluated by whether it advances or diminishes the full humanity of others (Gosnell, 2025). Shin's work on justice and the kingdom in Luke and Pillay's account of the kingdom as an alternative social order rather than an interior ideal place that logic in an explicitly political frame (Shin, 2013; Pillay, 2023). Situmorang and colleagues' study of hospitality in Luke's portrayal of Jesus describes the resulting community as one in which social distance does not determine human worth (Situmorang *et al.*, 2025).

5. Postcolonial African citizenship: Subjects, Citizens and the Corruption Question

5.1 The Bifurcated State and Its Afterlife

Mahmood Mamdani's account remains the indispensable starting point. Colonial rule in Africa, he argued, produced a bifurcated state: a civil order of rights for urban subjects racially defined as citizens, and a rural order of enforced custom administered through chiefs whose authority was decentralised despotism. Independence deracialised the civil order without democratising the customary one, so that the citizen-subject division survived the transfer of power (Mamdani, 1996).

The structural parallel with section 2 is close enough to be uncomfortable. Rome's provincial subjects encountered a legal order that distributed standing unequally and treated full membership as a privilege most would never hold (Lavan, 2016). Colonial subjects encountered the same architecture in a different idiom. In both cases the formative lesson was that law is something that happens differently to different categories of person, and in both cases the lesson was learned thoroughly.

Against Mamdani it is objected, reasonably, that the model flattens enormous variation across colonial regimes and postcolonial trajectories, and that the customary sphere was never as hermetic as the model implies. The edited collection assembled by Dorman, Hammett and Nugent presses something like this point by attending to the everyday processes through which African states have made nations and, in the same operation, created strangers (Dorman, Hammett & Nugent, 2007). But the collection's

findings do not displace Mamdani so much as specify him: the making of strangers is precisely what a bifurcated inheritance makes available.

5.2 Autochthony, Belonging and the Shrinking of the Citizen

Peter Geschiere's work identifies the mechanism by which that inheritance is currently being activated. Claims to autochthony, to being first-comers and sons of the soil, have proliferated across Africa and Europe alike, and they operate by a distinctive logic: the category of the genuine insider can always be narrowed further, so that autochthony generates rather than settles disputes about belonging (Geschiere, 2009). Francis Nyamnjoh's study of citizenship and xenophobia in southern Africa traces the same dynamic in the treatment of migrants and internal outsiders (Nyamnjoh, 2006).

This matters for civic formation because autochthony is a memory claim. Its currency is a story about who arrived first, and its political force depends on that story being shared. Ranger's account of patriotic history in Zimbabwe shows a state deliberately manufacturing such a currency, converting a plural memory of liberation war into a binary of patriots and sell-outs that could be used to disqualify opponents from national belonging (Ranger, 2004).

Set beside Luke 10, the contrast is exact. The Samaritan parable takes an established ethnic boundary and makes the excluded party the one who acts as a neighbour, which is to say it attacks autochthony's premise that priority of belonging determines obligation (Keddie, 2020; Ryan, 2021). A community formed on that script has a resource against the politics of the soil. Whether African churches have in fact used it that way is an empirical question the literature has not adequately answered, and section 7 returns to it.

5.3 Public Memory after Colonial Rule

What do African publics remember about office, and what do those memories license?

Three deposits are identifiable in the literature. The first is the memory of colonial administration itself: an apparatus experienced as extractive, staffed by outsiders, and answerable elsewhere. Where that memory is dominant, the state appears as something to be worked rather than owned, and taking from it registers differently than theft from a neighbour. Olivier de Sardan's account of the moral economy of corruption is the classic statement, and it is more careful than its reception often allows. He does not argue that African societies approve of corruption; he documents widespread disapproval alongside weak sanction, and shows corrupt practice embedded in logics of negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity, predatory authority and redistributive accumulation (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Yeboah-Assimah and colleagues describe the resulting conflicts in concrete terms, where extended-family obligation, ethnic loyalty and deference to seniority collide with professional norms (Yeboah-Assimah *et al.*, 2016).

The second deposit is the memory of independence, and of the promises made at it. Where those promises are remembered as broken, the relationship between citizen and state acquires a permanently disappointed structure. Le Bruyns's account of the rebirth of kairos theology in South Africa, connecting the kairos tradition to public theology and to the shackdwellers' movement Abahlali

baseMjondolo, describes churches attempting to keep that disappointment politically productive rather than corrosive (Le Bruyns, 2015).

Third, and most double-edged, comes the memory of liberation struggle. It supplies genuine democratic capital and it supplies the material for patriotic history (Ranger, 2004). The comparative study of Nigeria, Mali, Rwanda and South Africa concludes that ethnicity remains a dormant force until operationalised for political gain through deliberate memory distortion, and that repressive management of the past suppresses violence without producing reconciliation (Iroanya, Nguluwe & Ndapulamo, 2020).

None of this shows that African publics remember badly. The point is rather that the memories available to them were laid down by an administrative order no democratic transition has reached, and that the expectations those memories generate are the raw material any anti-corruption effort must work with.

5.4 Ubuntu and Its Romanticisation

Ubuntu is the most frequently proposed indigenous resource for African civic ethics, and it deserves both a fair hearing and a sceptical one.

The fair hearing first. Thaddeus Metz's philosophical reconstruction answers the three standard objections of vagueness, collectivism and anachronism by grounding human dignity in the capacity for community, understood as identification with others combined with solidarity towards them, and by showing that this grounding can explain why particular rights protections matter and can guide disputes over land, participation and permissible force (Metz, 2011). That is a serious piece of normative construction, and it is not fairly dismissed as sentiment. Sipondo's proposals for Ubuntu ethical leadership in African public administration attempt the institutional translation, connecting dignity and participation to trust, accountability and service delivery (Sipondo, 2025).

Now the scepticism, which this article regards as decisive for how Ubuntu may be used. Christian Gade's historical study of written ubuntu discourse from 1846 to 2011 finds that before 1980 the word denoted a human quality, humanness or goodness, and that its association with the Nguni proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* first appears in written sources between 1993 and 1995, during the constitutional transition and the inclusion of ubuntu in the interim constitution's epilogue (Gade, 2011). The communitarian philosophy routinely presented as ancient African wisdom acquired its canonical formulation during a negotiated settlement, roughly thirty years ago.

Matolino and Kwindingwi press harder, arguing that the post-apartheid revival of ubuntu is an elite project of the emergent black leadership class, comparable to earlier continental promotions of African identity that coincided with decolonisation and elite ascendancy and ended in public failure, and that there is a gap between the metaphysical conditions ubuntu requires and the actual condition of the society invoking it (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013).

These findings do not refute Metz, who is doing normative philosophy and is entitled to construct rather than report. They do constrain how Ubuntu may be used here. Ubuntu cannot function as evidence that African publics already possess a communitarian civic ethic awaiting activation;

Gade's dating forbids that. It can function as a normative proposal, made in the present, for what such an ethic might be. That is a smaller claim, and an honest one. Papers that make the larger claim mistake a recent construction for a remembered inheritance.

Emmanuel Katongole's political theology arrives at a compatible position from within theology. He argues that colonialism and modernity distorted the African Christian social imagination, that nation-state politics has constrained Christian witness, and that renewal requires the reordering of social practice rather than better performance within existing political categories (Katongole, 2010). Rukundwa's account of postcolonial theory as a hermeneutical tool, and Nyiauwung's proposal for an African biblical hermeneutic that moves from reader-text-context to new context-new text-new reader, describe the interpretive machinery such a reordering would need (Rukundwa, 2008; Nyiauwung, 2013).

5.5 Corruption as a Failure of Civic Formation

The argument of this section can now be stated. Corruption in postcolonial Africa is better modelled as a failure of civic formation and of the public memory that sustains it than as a deficit of individual leadership virtue.

Four lines of evidence support the reframing. The first is the collective-action finding: where corruption is systemic, individual integrity is experienced as futile, and reforms built on the assumption of a clean principal monitoring a corrupt agent fail because no clean principal exists (Persson, Rothstein & Teorell, 2013). The second is normative-social: social norms sustain corrupt practice even where individuals privately disapprove, and interventions that ignore local normative structures generate weak or temporary effects (Kubbe, Baez-Camargo & Scharbatke-Church, 2024). The third is experimental. In an experiment with more than 1,300 Ugandan bureaucrats, priming social status reduced pro-social donations by around 1,639 Ugandan shillings, but only among officials embedded in patronage networks; officials outside such networks showed no effect (Harris *et al.*, 2023). The norm is doing the work, not the person.

The fourth is the most disruptive for conventional practice. Anti-corruption messaging in Lagos failed to reduce bribery and in several conditions increased it, conditional on respondents' prior beliefs about prevalence (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022a), and four of five messages reduced agreement that citizens have a duty to pay tax (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022b). Notably, the one message that did not damage tax morale was the religious message, which invoked faith leaders' opposition to corruption without naming government institutions. The authors attribute this to the message not activating state-focused blame. Set against Peiffer and Walton's finding in Papua New Guinea that messages emphasising corruption's effects on valued communities may encourage reporting more effectively than messages stressing prevalence or illegality (Peiffer & Walton, 2022), a pattern emerges that the Lukan material anticipates: narratives that make harm concrete and located do better than narratives that make corruption statistical and ubiquitous. Luke never tells his audience how common exploitation is. He shows them one man at one gate.

Two further pieces complete the picture. Barry Driscoll's analysis of 268 African Studies articles finds that political scientists have progressively conflated the Big Man with the dictator and the thief, overstating theft and understating accountability, when the concept originally described a

figure powerful precisely because indebted to those beneath him (Driscoll, 2020). If that is right, then the patronage system contains an accountability logic of its own, which universalist reform neither recognises nor replaces. And Okafor, Opara and Adebisi's study of Nigerian anti-corruption agents finds whistleblowing valued in principle but weakened by enforcement, cultural and institutional difficulty (Okafor, Opara & Adebisi, 2020) — a finding that reads less as a problem of individual courage than as a problem of what a citizen can reasonably expect the state to do with a disclosure.

The counter-argument must be met squarely, because it is strong. Structural accounts of corruption can function as alibis. If the norms are the problem, the official who stole is merely a node in a network, and the theft becomes a sociological datum rather than a wrong. Gorsira, Denkers and Huisman's comparison of public officials and business employees resists that slide, finding moral conviction, perceived peer behaviour and the difficulty of rule compliance all predictive of corruption propensity (Gorsira, Denkers & Huisman, 2018). Moral conviction is in the model. Kure's theological diagnosis of Nigerian leadership, which links corruption to a self-interest that diminishes human dignity, names the wrong as a wrong (Kure, 2020), as does Nnabuike's identification of a persistent gap between defining ethical leadership and enforcing it (Nnabuike, 2010), and Lekubu and Sibanda's insistence on integrity and public-interest orientation in South African administration (Lekubu & Sibanda, 2021). Kgatle's argument for servant leadership as a response to South African public-sector abuse belongs here too, though section 7 will register a reservation about the evidence base it rests on (Kgatle, 2018).

Nothing in this reframing exonerates anyone. It relocates the leverage. Individual culpability is a matter for prosecutors; civic formation is a matter for whoever controls the scripts a society rehearses.

6. Comparative synthesis: What Each Model Asks of a Citizen

6.1 Three Answers to One Question

Each tradition answers the question of what makes a citizen, and the answers differ in ways that matter.

The Greco-Roman answer, in its Athenian form, is participation in a shared ritual life transmitted by descent (Blok, 2017). In its Roman form it is possession of a legal status graded by birth, service or purchase, held by a minority of provincials (Lavan, 2016; van Minnen, 1995). The formative mechanism is repetition in the first case and differential treatment before the law in the second, and both are supplemented by the honorific economy through which elites converted wealth into standing and cities were taught annually whom to thank (Zuiderhoek, 2009; Harland, 1996). Luke's answer is membership in a community constituted by reversal. Its marks are the refusal of reciprocal invitation, the treatment of office as revocable trust, restitution where benefit has been derived from wrong, and the habit of reading authority from the position of those least able to reward it. Its formative mechanism is narrative rehearsal (Rindge, 2014; Seal, 2018; Howe & Sweetser, 2021).

The postcolonial African answer is contested at the level of the question itself. Formally, citizenship is a constitutional status. Practically, it is negotiated against an inherited bifurcation between rights-bearing citizens and custom-

governed subjects (Mamdani, 1996), against autochthony claims that narrow belonging by appeal to priority (Geschiere, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2006), and against a state whose legitimacy is mediated through memories laid down under administrations answerable elsewhere (Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Ranger, 2004).

6.2 Where the Models Genuinely Conflict

Two conflicts are worth naming, because papers of this kind usually harmonise them.

The first concerns descent. Athenian citizenship ran on legitimate descent, and autochthony politics runs on priority of arrival. These are formally similar, and both are incompatible with the Lukan script, which makes the Samaritan the exemplar and the excluded guest the rightful diner. A community serious about the Lukan material is committed against a large part of what both ancient and contemporary citizenship practice has actually looked like. That is a cost, and it should be stated as one.

A second conflict concerns honour. The Greco-Roman order converted wealth into standing by design, and Driscoll's reconstruction suggests that African Big Man politics retains a version of the same convertibility, with accountability running through the obligation the patron incurs to his dependants (Driscoll, 2020). Luke attacks the conversion itself (Lull, 1986; Nelson, 1991; Etukumana, 2024). This is a genuine disagreement about political goods, not a misunderstanding. A system in which patrons are indebted to clients does distribute something, and abolishing it without replacement removes a functioning mechanism. The Lukan alternative, an obligation owed to those who cannot reciprocate, is harder to institutionalise precisely because it generates no return flow.

What emerges is not a merger but a diagnosis. All three models understand that citizens are made rather than born, and all three locate the making in repeated practice rather than in instruction. They disagree about which practices, and about who is eligible. What the comparison recommends is that African civic formation be conducted with explicit awareness of which of the three scripts a given practice is running, because at present the three run simultaneously and the collisions are attributed to individual vice.

7. Implications and Research Priorities

7.1 Relocating Anti-corruption Effort

If the argument holds, three practical relocations follow.

Move the effort upstream, from officeholders to publics. Quaynor's multi-study work in Ghana and Liberia found students articulating citizenship through locally salient values including ethnic identity, social equity and participatory governance, and found substantial civic learning occurring outside schools in youth associations and informal gatherings (Quaynor, 2015). Formation is already happening in those spaces; the question is what it is teaching.

Change the message. The Lagos experiments indicate that prevalence framing is counterproductive where pessimism is already high (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022a, 2022b), while community-harm framing performed better in Papua New Guinea (Peiffer & Walton, 2022). The Lukan repertoire is almost entirely community-harm framing with named victims.

Protect the disclosers. Whistleblowing is the point at which formation meets institutional capacity, and Nigerian

evidence shows the gap (Okafor, Opara & Adebisi, 2020). Indonesian evidence that authentic leadership can encourage internal whistleblowing through moral courage indicates that organisational conditions matter, though the causal claim rests on self-report and should be held loosely (Anita & Abdillah, 2021).

7.2 A Sceptical Note on the Leadership Literature

The theological literature on Lukan leadership leans heavily on servant-leadership scholarship, and that support is weaker than its users assume. Eva and colleagues' systematic review defines the construct around an other-focused orientation prioritising follower development and wellbeing (Eva *et al.*, 2019), but Liden and van Knippenberg's recent assessment identifies persistent problems: insufficient theoretical specification of the mechanisms linking servant behaviours to outcomes, inadequate theoretical justification of the construct's dimensions, unresolved measurement and construct-validity questions, and a general excess of positivity in leadership research that inflates benefit claims (Liden & van Knippenberg, 2025). Banks and colleagues reach a parallel verdict on ethical leadership, noting construct overlap and the conflation of leader behaviours with follower evaluations, which limits causal claims (Banks *et al.*, 2021). For theological appropriation the implication is direct. Claims of the form "Luke's model of servant leadership produces better institutional outcomes" borrow empirical authority the underlying research does not possess. Owens, Johnson and Mitchell's work on expressed humility (Owens *et al.*, 2013) and Krumrei-Mancuso and Rowatt's finding that humility in novice leaders correlates with servant-leadership characteristics and follower satisfaction (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rowatt, 2023) are genuine findings, but they are findings about perceptions within organisations, not about corruption in states. Amory and colleagues' cross-temporal meta-analysis makes the scaling problem explicit, showing that ethical leadership's relationship with outcomes varies with cultural values and national corruption conditions (Amory *et al.*, 2024), and Dodamgoda and colleagues' review of Eastern scholarship shows how differently moral authority and relational duty are construed across traditions (Dodamgoda *et al.*, 2025). Cheteni and Shindika's comparison of public utilities in South Africa and Botswana confirms that perceptions of ethical leadership vary within African settings (Cheteni & Shindika, 2017).

This is not a reason to discard the literature. It is a reason to cite it for what it shows. Brown, Treviño and Harrison's social-learning account of how followers read leaders' conduct as signals about acceptable behaviour remains well supported (Brown, Treviño & Harrison, 2005), and Bashir and Hassan's finding that ethical managerial leadership is associated with lower reported corruption, mediated by reward structures and procedural fairness, is directly relevant (Bashir & Hassan, 2020). Hassan, Wright and Yukl's government-sector evidence on commitment, absenteeism and willingness to report ethical problems is likewise usable (Hassan, Wright & Yukl, 2014). What none of it establishes is that better leaders will solve systemic corruption, and the reframing this article proposes is partly a response to that gap.

7.3 A Research Agenda

Six priorities follow, ordered by tractability.

Test the formation claim. The proposition that narrative rehearsal alters civic expectation is measurable. Longitudinal designs comparing congregations or schools engaged in sustained parable-based civic formation against matched controls could examine descriptive and injunctive norms: what participants believe others do, and what they believe others approve (Kubbe, Baez-Camargo & Scharbatke-Church, 2024).

Map the scripts. No systematic inventory exists of which biblical narratives African churches actually deploy in public-ethical teaching, or with what political valence. Ranger's work shows how consequential such inventories are when states compile them (Ranger, 2004).

Study autochthony and the Samaritan script together. Whether communities formed on Luke 10 resist autochthonous exclusion is an empirical question with obvious policy relevance (Geschiere, 2009; Keddie, 2020).

Develop measures of civic formation distinct from leadership measures. The construct problems identified by Banks and colleagues and by Liden and van Knippenberg will simply be imported if theological research borrows existing instruments (Banks *et al.*, 2021; Liden & van Knippenberg, 2025).

Investigate memory repair. Where public memory has been narrowed by state action, what reverses it? The comparative work on Nigeria, Mali, Rwanda and South Africa suggests that remembrance without resentment is the condition to be engineered, without specifying how (Iroanya, Nguluwe & Ndapulam, 2020).

Study resistance under vulnerability, comparatively. Becker-Ferreira and Van Eck's bringing of the Lukan Jesus into dialogue with Levinas on otherness and responsibility offers a conceptual starting point (Becker-Ferreira & Van Eck, 2023), and Potgieter's resilience reading of Luke 18 suggests the relevant variable is endurance rather than heroism (Potgieter, 2023). Mixed-method work on whistleblowers, junior officials and marginalised claimants should ask when resistance succeeds and when it provokes retaliation. Discretionary civic conduct is measurable in African organisational settings: Nwanzu and Babalola found ethical leadership predicting voluntary pro-environmental behaviour in Delta State (Nwanzu & Babalola, 2025). Related instruments exist. Liao, Cheng and Chen link socially responsible human resource management to ethical voice (Liao, Cheng & Chen, 2022); Cheng, Bai and Hu identify error-management climate as a condition of voice (Cheng, Bai & Hu, 2022); Rego and colleagues and Mansur, Sobral and Islam measure moral courage and its perception (Rego *et al.*, 2025; Mansur, Sobral & Islam, 2020).

8. Conclusion

The title of this article names three things, and the argument has tried to show that they are one thing seen three ways. Empire is a system for distributing standing. Memory is the medium through which a distribution is naturalised or contested. Civic formation is what happens when a population internalises one distribution rather than another. Luke's reversal material is best read as a contribution to that contest rather than as a leadership manual. Its target was a specific political economy in which benefaction converted wealth into honour and honour into authority, and Luke 22:25 names that conversion with unusual precision. Its method was not legislation but the supply of scenes: a table where invitation cannot be repaid, a tax farmer repaying

fourfold, a widow who will not stop asking, a man at a gate whom nobody saw. Those scenes were portable, and their portability was the point.

The transfer to postcolonial Africa is warranted, but not on the terms usually offered. It is not that African leaders should be more like the Lukan servant. It is that African publics inherited a citizenship formed under an administration answerable elsewhere, and that the expectations laid down by that inheritance are what anti-corruption effort has repeatedly failed to shift. Where messaging campaigns have depressed tax morale and left bribery untouched, the fault was not insufficient moral exhortation but a misreading of what was being addressed. Two cautions close the argument. The structural account offered here must not become an alibi; moral conviction predicts conduct, and theft remains theft. And the indigenous resource most often proposed for African civic renewal requires more care than it usually receives, since the communitarian ubuntu presented as ancient inheritance acquired its canonical formulation during a constitutional negotiation in the 1990s. A civic ethic may still be built on it. It should be built openly, as construction rather than recovery, which is precisely the honesty the Lukan material models when it asks a community to remember differently rather than to remember more.

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