

Can Public Theology Be Practised Beyond The State?

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Abstract

This article reflects on the relationship between public theology and the state. It suggests that a state-centric paradigm plays a significant role in the self-understanding and practice of public theology, and that transnationalism can serve as correction to state-centrism. It argues that these concepts complement the existing discourse on globalization in public theology. The article investigates the role of churches in the struggle against apartheid as an early example of transnationalism in public theology. The concluding section shows that transnationalism may aid the practitioners of public theology to reflect critically on its relation to the state.

Keywords

public theology, transnationalism, apartheid, Global Compact, state-centrism

Introduction

This article started with a hunch that the emerging field of public theology depends to a significant extent on a state-centric paradigm for understanding itself and its interactions. The hunch is, of course, countered by the fact that significant theological traditions in virtually all Christian communities have consistently held that all theology precedes the influence of states. In a fundamental sense public theology should therefore also be possible beyond the influence, and even categories, of states.

This article argues that there seem to be signs of, or the possibility of, at least two paradigms of organizing the relationship between the state and public theology, namely state-centrism and transnationalism. I will suggest that transnationalism can provide an important impulse for conceptualizing public theology beyond the state, and in so doing, I choose not to make explicit use of a related discourse in public theology, namely the discourse on

glocalization.¹ While the glocalization discourse brings a great deal of precision to understanding the relationship between the local and the global in public theology, this article is meant to complement work on glocalization by focusing on the state as an important and by no means unproblematic actor in relating the global and the local. I hope that reflection on role of the state, even in the categories in terms of which public theology is practised, may provide even more precision to the relation between different contexts in public theology.

The argument is developed in four sections. In the first section I attempt to formulate a working definition of public theology. I then proceed, in the second section, to identify possible signs of state-centrism in the current practice of public theology. In the third section the possibility of correcting a state-centric paradigm with a transnational paradigm is considered and illustrated by means of the public theologies of those churches that struggled against apartheid. In the last section a contemporary expression of transnationalism is considered, and some suggestions are made for the practice of public theology.

What is Public Theology?

Before reflecting on the relation between public theology and the state, and asking whether it is possible to conceptualize public theology beyond the state, we would do well to get clarity on the meaning of 'public theology'. In his keynote lecture at the International Conference on Public Theology, hosted by the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Centre for Public Theology in Bamberg in 2011, Dirk Smit reminded us that public theology can be defined by tracing a number of narratives.²

According to Smit, the classic narrative continues to be public theology as 'theology in the naked public square'.³ The American 'wall of separation' between religion and politics creates this 'naked public square'. Smit quotes

¹ See, for example, William F. Storrar, 'Where the Local and the Global Meet: Duncan Forrester's *Glocal* Public Theology and Scottish Political Context', in William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, eds, *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), pp. 405–30; Clive Pearson, 'The Quest for a Glocal Public Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 11 (2007), 151–72.

² Dirk J. Smit, 'The Paradigm of Public Theology: Origins and Development', keynote address delivered at a conference on 'Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Public Theology', University of Bamberg, Germany, 23–25 June 2011.

³ Ibid.

Harold Breitenberg in identifying three aspects of this narrative of public theology: it is 'theologically informed discourse', 'ethical in nature' and 'available and open to all'.⁴ Public theology in this sense is one form of civil religion and aimed at providing 'a contribution to American public life from the side of the churches and theological traditions'.⁵

Another narrative of public theology takes David Tracy's seminal essay 'Theology as Public Discourse' as starting point.⁶ Public theology in this sense is 'about a whole new way of doing theology, addressing diverse publics through critical rational discourses that they share'.⁷ Rather than giving accessible and mostly ethical guidance on public issues, this narrative is about the 'modes of argumentation . . . methods . . . warrants, backings, evidence'⁸ that allow public theology to be a form of public discourse.⁹

A further narrative of public theology has its origins in continental Europe and is practised in the discursive public sphere of pluralist democracies.¹⁰ Smit regards the German theologian Wolfgang Huber as representative of this narrative.¹¹ Huber regards the 'public' as one societal sphere in which societal actors articulate their contributions to societal discussion by transparently drawing on their particular sources.¹² This narrative is built on the conviction that the particularities of public theology enable and enrich public discourse, and contribute to those presuppositions the democratic state cannot itself guarantee.¹³

Smit reminds us that not all stories of public theology are developed in the context of pluralist and secular democracies. The relationship between theology and its societal context is not always 'harmonious, rational and discursive' and is often 'a contested relationship of power, conflict and struggle'.¹⁴ In this

⁴) Ibid.

⁵) Ibid.

⁶) David Tracy, 'Theology as Public Discourse', *The Christian Century*, (19 March 1975), 280–84.

⁷) Smit, 'The Paradigm of Public Theology'.

⁸) Tracy, 'Theology as Public Discourse', 280.

⁹) Smit, 'The Paradigm of Public Theology'.

¹⁰) Ibid.

¹¹) Ibid.

¹²) See Wolfgang Huber, 'Öffentliche Kirche in pluralen Öffentlichkeiten', *Evangelische Theologie*, 54:2 (1994), 157–80.

¹³) Cf. Michael Welker, 'Wovon der freiheitliche Staat lebt. Die Quellen politischer Loyalität im spätmodernen Pluralismus', in H.-R. Reuter, H. Bedford-Strohm, H. Kuhlmann and K.-H. Lütcke, eds, *Freiheit verantworten: Festschrift für Wolfgang Huber zum 60. Geburtstag* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002), pp. 225–42.

¹⁴) Smit, 'The Paradigm of Public Theology'.

sense public theology can be defined by an even further narrative, namely the public struggles of those who practise theology. In this narrative Smit includes liberation theologies, black theologies and feminist theologies.¹⁵ The practitioners of these theologies mostly do not refer to themselves as explicitly 'public' theologians, but they certainly address issues that are raised by public theologians elsewhere.¹⁶

Even though Smit continues by identifying even more stories of public theology, these narratives can already be taken as a starting point for constructing a working definition of public theology. In most of these stories the practitioners of theology choose, for whatever reason, to address audiences other than the church. Often the church continues to be part of the intended audience, but in all of these stories people and groups other than the church form at least part of the intended audience. This rather descriptive working definition will form the basis for our argument in the rest of the article. All of those practitioners of theology who address not only the church are to be regarded as public theologians.

We continue by considering the relation between public theology—understood in this broad and descriptive sense—and the state. In the next section the extent to which public theology is practised within the conceptual boundaries set by the state will be investigated.

Public Theology Within the State

Before we consider the possibility of practising public theology beyond the conceptual boundaries of the state, we need to reflect on the meaning of practising public theology within the state. The state in this sense is an inclusive term that refers to the political executive, bureaucracy, processes directly associated with the maintenance of the political system, legislative apparatuses and the judiciary. Two concepts juxtaposed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in their seminal article on transnationalism will be used to structure our discussion.¹⁷ In this section state-centrism will be used to consider public theology within the state, while in the next section transnationalism will be used to consider public theology beyond the state.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, 'Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction', *International Organization*, 25:3 (1971), 329–49.

State-centrism is built on the classic understanding of the modern state. As Weber reminds us, the modern state should be defined in terms of its means, and not in terms of its perceived ends.¹⁸ The state has the means to monopolize certain forms of power. This enables Weber to famously define the state as ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’.¹⁹ Contemporary definitions of state-centric views of the modern state continue the thrust of Weber’s original definition. The state’s power is entrenched by its distinct territory, its constitution, its monopoly on conferring and defining citizenship, its monopoly on protecting rights and the assumption that its citizens share a unified identity conceptually framed by the state itself.²⁰

Such an understanding of the state—in Ulrich Beck’s words ‘methodological nationalism’²¹—logically leads to a specific form of interaction within but also between states. Nye and Keohane identify representative hierarchy based on the spatial borders and the monopoly on power of the respective states as the basis for inter-state interactions in a state-centric paradigm.²² According to this understanding, societies interact with their respective states; states interact with one another and may even form supranational organizations that represent the interests of the respective states and by implication their societies.

State-Centrism in Public Theology?

It is possible to identify signs of state-centrism amongst the practitioners of public theology. In the first volume of the *International Journal of Public Theology*, for example, the subject of public theology is treated from a South African perspective,²³ interfaith and religious-secular collaboration is conceptualized from a British perspective,²⁴ Chinese views on glocalization are presented,²⁵ as

¹⁸ Max Weber, *Gesammelte politische Schriften* (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1921), pp. 396–7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Cf. Bhikhu Parekh, ‘Reconstituting the Modern State’, in J. Anderson, ed., *Transnational Democracy: Political Spaces and Border Crossings* (Routledge: London and New York, 2002), pp. 39–55 at pp. 41–2.

²¹ Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), pp. 64–8.

²² Nye and Keohane, ‘Transnational Relations and World Politics’, 332.

²³ John de Gruchy, ‘Public Theology as Christian Witness: Exploring The Genre’, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:1 (2007), 26–41.

²⁴ David F. Ford, ‘God and Our Public Life: A Scriptural Wisdom’, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:1 (2007), 63–81.

²⁵ P. Tze Ming Ng, ‘“Glocalization” as a Key to the Interplay Between Christianity and Asian Cultures: The Vision of Francis Wei in Early Twentieth Century China’, *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:1 (2007), 101–11.

are Indian views on consumerism.²⁶ Although categories such as 'South Africa', 'Britain', 'China' and 'India' include a vast variety of perspectives, groups and narratives, these categories have meaning especially in a hierarchical, representative—essentially state-centric—understanding of the respective societies.

Since the first volume of the journal the explicit use of state-centric categories has certainly lessened. This is illustrated by, in some instances, a more limited use of these categories, and in other instances a more differentiated use is employed. An exchange between Storrar and Tinyiko Maluleke in a 2011 special issue on 'Responsible South African Public Theology in a Global Era' is an instance where state-centric categories are used in the latter sense.²⁷ Maluleke contrasts Storrar's 'romantic' and 'overwhelmingly positive' notion of public, where 'we meet one another as strangers but seek to treat one another with civility', recognizing one another 'as fellow human beings and citizens, even in our profound differences and outlook',²⁸ with a differentiated understanding of the South African context. In South Africa, he contends, this conception of public life seems 'a massive and precarious assumption',²⁹ as South African differences are 'not only soft but hard, not only horizontal but vertical', not a case of 'some believe in hell and others believe in heaven but rather that some live already in heaven while others live already in hell'.³⁰

In another 2011 issue of the journal one sees examples of a more limited use of state-centric categories. Julia Pitman, for example, considers feminist theology in the Uniting Church in Australia.³¹ She limits her national context by making use both of the concepts of a Christian community and the case studies of the prominent Australian theologians Lilian Wells³² and Jill Tabart.³³ In his contribution Ilsup Ahn also makes limited use of state-centric categories, but

²⁶ J. J. Sebastian, 'Having and Sharing: Theological Perspectives From India On Consumerism and Exclusion', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 1:1 (2007), 112–26.

²⁷ D. Etienne de Villiers, 'Editorial: Special Issue—Responsible South African Public Theology in a Global Era', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 1–4.

²⁸ William Storrar, 'The Naming of Parts: Doing Public Theology in a Global Era', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 23–43 at 28.

²⁹ Tinyiko. S. Maluleke, 'The Elusive Public of Public Theology: A Response To William Storrar', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 70–89 at 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

³¹ Julia Pitman, 'Feminist Public theology in the Uniting Church in Australia', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 143–64.

³² *Ibid.*, 149–51.

³³ *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 151–63.

proceeds somewhat differently.³⁴ He consciously makes use of 'Korea' as a political category³⁵ and applies elements from Paul Tillich's theology to this political interpretation.

Even though the differentiated and limited use of state-centric categories seems to be increasing and the explicit use of these categories seems to be decreasing, it remains clear that state-centric categories play a role in understanding the relation between public theology and the state. It should be no surprise therefore that the articles referred to above are all published in an 'international' journal, rather tellingly referring to interaction between different geographically determined contexts defined by their respective states. Interestingly, the Global Network for Public Theology also seems to make use of conventional state-centric political categories, although to a lesser extent, when identifying some of its aims as fostering bilateral and multilateral collaboration.³⁶ It seems as if the conventional representative socio-political combination of geographically defined spaces and the related hierarchy of local, and particularly national and international spheres, is implied; at least to a noticeable extent.

Although the state certainly remains immensely powerful, changing global flows of power may require a (re)consideration of paradigms that challenge the state's monopoly on power. In the next section I will suggest that transnationalism provides one such possibility for doing this.

Public Theology Beyond the State

In their 1971 article, Nye and Keohane suggest that the movement of money and credit, information, physical objects and persons increasingly challenges the hierarchy and spatiality of state-centrism,³⁷ giving birth to transnational interactions. In their view these interactions can be described as 'the movement of tangible or intangible items across state boundaries when at least one actor is not an agent of a government or intergovernmental organization'.³⁸

³⁴) Il-sup Ahn, 'Paul Tillich's "Method of Correlation" and the Unification of Korea: From Correlation to Co-Reconstruction', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 5:1 (2011), 187–208.

³⁵) *Ibid.*, 187–8.

³⁶) See Global Network for Public Theology, 'About the Research Partnership', paras 1–23 at para. 10, <<http://www.csu.edu.au/special/acc/about/gnpt/index.htm>> [accessed 1 April 2011].

³⁷) Nye and Keohane, 'Transnational Relations and World Politics', 332.

³⁸) *Ibid.*

From this definition a number of characteristics of transnational interactions become clear.

First, actors in chiefly two spheres, namely states and societies, engage in transnational interactions. These actors may or may not choose to organize themselves in inter-governmental organizations. Since societies are comprised of everything that is not directly associated with the state, civil society and business are among these actors. The prominence the state continues to enjoy in this definition reflects the realistic acknowledgement that the state plays an important role in the functioning of communities; its influence has not necessarily diminished, but it has certainly changed.

Secondly, transnational interactions transcend the spatial borders of states, since societal actors may engage in interactions beyond or despite the borders of these states. Thus, the conventional hierarchy is relativized because societal actors are in the position to, and have the motivation to, engage directly other states, societies or supra-state institutions. The sharing of interests, convictions or concerns about the same issues seems to be superseding the primacy of shared space fundamental to a state-centric paradigm.

Thirdly, however, being able to transcend the borders of specific states does not mean that societal actors are located in some ethereal space beyond the borders of states; neither does it mean that issues or interests alien to their local contexts move them to engage transnationally. Even though many societal actors are theoretically more mobile, they still need to be located in a specific local context.³⁹ Central to transnational interactions is the fact that actors' interactions transcend the borders of states precisely due to the particular interests, convictions or issues of their local contexts.

The public theologies of South African churches that struggled against apartheid serve as early examples of public theology practised transnationally. With these theologies churches openly challenged a paradigm in which the state enjoyed a total monopoly on power, and directed their theologies to audiences much wider than their respective churches. The following section will identify signs of transnationalism in the struggle against apartheid.

Transnational Anti-Apartheid Public Theology?

The apartheid state certainly claimed and enacted a monopoly on power, often with significant degrees of force. This is made abundantly clear when the dimensions of the state's monopoly on power in a state-centric paradigm are

³⁹ Ibid., 336.

applied to the apartheid state. It claimed, for example, a monopoly on power in defining and conferring territories. The state used its monopoly on power to wage ideological wars in defence of its borders, and to confine black South Africans to state-defined areas within the state. State power was also used not simply to confer citizenship but to restrict citizenship; black South Africans were afforded more restricted rights than their white counterparts, and in addition less of an opportunity to realize these rights.⁴⁰ The apartheid state, in this sense, totalized the categories in terms of which South Africans understood themselves.

It can be said that the apartheid state used its monopoly on power to enforce a totalizing and dehumanizing form of state-centrism. One of the ways in which churches that actively opposed apartheid challenged this form of state-centrism was by enacting a transnational form of public theology. This can be illustrated by means of the three characteristics of transnationalism outlined above. I will show that the churches that actively struggled against apartheid challenged the ultimate power of the state in ways that transcended its spatial borders, whilst drawing on the particularities of their specific contexts.

First, when church leaders increasingly issued public calls to challenge the state, without excluding the possibility of using violence, they essentially challenged a state-centric paradigm. The church emerged as a societal grouping whose ultimate commitment is 'to be true to its Christ and its calling' and therefore in a position to conceive 'the ultimate confrontation between the church and [the apartheid] state'.⁴¹ This provided the basis for engaging in transnational interactions, since the state is recognized as but one societal actor.

Secondly, the interactions of those churches that struggled against apartheid increasingly took on transnational forms. The churches formed part of what is now known as 'one of the most influential social movements during the post-war era', which led to the creation of 'transnational networks, organizations, and collective active forms' that impacted on 'national as well as transnational political cultures'.⁴² A salient example in this regard is the process that led to the declaration of a *status confessiones* in South Africa.⁴³

⁴⁰ See D. Davis and M. Le Roux, *Precedent & Possibility: The (Ab)use of Law in South Africa* (Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2009).

⁴¹ Allan Boesak, 'The Black Church and the Struggle In South Africa', *Ecumenical Review*, 32:1 (1980), 16–24 at 21.

⁴² Håkan Thörn, 'Solidarity Across Borders: The Transnational Anti-Apartheid Movement', *Voluntas*, 17:4 (2006), 285–301 at 285–6.

⁴³ Piet J. Naudé, *Neither Calendar nor Clock: Perspectives on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), pp. 55–6.

It is informative to note that the South African Manas Buthelezi first suggested the declaration of a *status confessiones* not in South Africa but at the Lutheran World Federation's meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1977. In 1982, at the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' (WARC) meeting Ottawa, Canada, the South African theologian Allan Boesak, who was also elected president of WARC, spearheaded the process of declaring a *status confessiones* in South Africa. This again enabled the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church to initiate the process for declaring a *status confessiones* and ultimately drafting the Belhar Confession. It is clear that networks that transcended the geographical borders of the South African state enabled churches to address and influence audiences much wider than South African churches.

This is closely linked to a third characteristic of transnational public theology practised by churches that opposed apartheid. South African churches were not moved to action by issues removed from their immediate contexts; on the contrary, these churches were able to form transnational networks and challenge the state's assumed monopoly on power as a result of the particularity of their very contextual challenges. Apartheid violated the fundamental human dignity of black South Africans and in this particular context many churches realized that they had no choice but to engage in transnational interactions.

At least one key question remains, namely what the tension between transnationalism and state-centrism may mean for a world in which apartheid was overcome nearly two decades ago. Hence, I will conclude this article with a contemporary example of transnationalism and suggestions on the implications for public theology.

Considering Transnational Public Theology

The United Nations' Global Compact (GC) is one of the most important contemporary examples of transnationalism. In this section I will use the GC to conclude our argument and to distil three implications that transnationalism has for public theology. However, we need to start with some background on the GC.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's address at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 1999, in which he proposed that business leaders embrace a 'global compact of shared values and principles', is generally understood as the genesis of the ten principles of the Global Compact.⁴⁴ These principles are

⁴⁴ Oliver F. Williams, 'The UN Global Compact: The Challenge and Promise', *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 14:4 (2004), 755-74 at 755.

taken from a number of official United Nations sources, notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work drafted by the International Labour Organization and the UN's Convention Against Corruption.⁴⁵

Since its official launch in July 2000 the GC has developed into a 'global movement' with over six thousand signatories from business and two thousand from civil society, comprising groups from more than 135 countries.⁴⁶ In its Annual Review for 2010 the Global Compact Office identifies a number of the most important developments in this movement over the last ten years. Two interrelated developments are important: the first of which is that the GC has 'gone global' since its inception, and now includes participants from virtually all industries and sectors from most countries.⁴⁷ These participants can be grouped together in five categories: business enterprises, business associations, international labour, academic institutions, actors in civil society.⁴⁸

Secondly, and at the same time, the GC has 'gone local'.⁴⁹ In more than ninety countries local networks have been launched to 'advance understanding and implementation' of the principles 'individually and collectively'.⁵⁰ Diverse actors from many different societal sectors are active on both global and local levels; globally they have members in all of the GC's workings groups, while they are also active members in most of the local networks.⁵¹ The emergence of multi-stakeholder issue networks within the Global Compact network is a pertinent example of how the GC has gone local amidst extreme contextual complexities. These networks are, as the name indicates, issue-driven with dynamic structures; they include actors from governments, businesses and civil society and they come into existence 'to develop and implement a common approach to a complex, urgent issue' that affects all of the actors.⁵² It provides a platform for these actors to engage in societies and states on issues deemed of shared importance, without relying on 'formalities' or 'bureaucratic

⁴⁵ Ibid., 756.

⁴⁶ United Nations Global Compact, *United Nations Global Compact Annual Review—Anniversary Edition* (New York: UNGC, 2010), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁸ George Kell and David Levin, 'The Global Compact Network: A Historical Experiment in Learning and Action', *Business and Society Review*, 108:2 (2003), 151–81 at 153.

⁴⁹ United Nations Global Compact, *United Nations Global Compact Annual Review*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵² United Nations Global Compact Office, *Coming of Age: UN-Private Sector Collaboration Since 2000* (UNGC: New York, 2010), p. 30.

structures⁵³ to organize the differences between the actors. These complex networks of interaction with dynamic structures and multilateral participation in local and global frameworks rely on partnerships limited by the issues addressed.

When one views the interactions that are facilitated by the GC in terms of the theory on transnational interactions, it is evident that the GC indeed enables and promotes transnational interactions; moreover, this can be seen in at least three respects, which will be applied to public theology.

First, the state is but one of a number of actors in these interactions, with societal actors playing a significant role in setting the agenda. A state-centric paradigm in which societal concerns are delegated to the respective states is challenged, as most societies' problems are too complex and expensive to be addressed by states alone; business activities have globalized and the influence of business has expanded significantly; further, the social and ecological effects of business activities cannot be addressed solely by legal regulation.⁵⁴ The GC therefore recognizes the 'governance void' brought about by different forms of globalization.⁵⁵

The theory and practice of transnationalism may assist in problematizing the categories in terms of which public theology is practised. Categories legitimated by states are by no means neutral, nor do they seem to be the only categories available. Indeed, changing global flows of power may require that the practitioners of public theology consider the limitations of those categories provided by the state.

Secondly, the GC does not exist independently of the particular local contexts that are represented by the wide range of different participants. The growing importance of multi-stakeholder issue networks illustrates how shared concern for a specific issue balances the differences between different contexts.⁵⁶ A shared perception of a shared issue clearly allows for dynamic structures and cooperation, despite great contextual differences; in fact, these differences are experienced as resources without which the particular issue

53) Kell and Levin, 'The Global Compact Network', 152.

54) United Nations Global Compact Office, *United Nations Global Compact Annual Review*, p. 9.

55) Kell and Levin, 'The Global Compact Network', 52.

56) See Ralph Hamann, Jon Hanks, Lothar Rieth and Melanie Zimmer, 'The UN Global Compact in Sub-Saharan Africa: Decentralization and Effectiveness', *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, 28 (2007), 99–112.

cannot be addressed adequately, and this is especially the case for issues of sustainability.⁵⁷

Transnationalism reminds us that there seem to be no spaces, or contexts, between local contexts. The particularities of local contexts and their perception of their unique challenges are the constitutive elements of transnational relations. In this regard, transnationalism may strengthen attempts at developing very contextual public theologies beyond political categories.

This is closely linked to a third characteristic, namely that the GC relativizes conventional political hierarchies, as is clear already in the organizational form of the GC. A 'legally binding code of conduct with explicit performance criteria and . . . monitoring and enforcement of . . . compliance'⁵⁸ would have required the unlikely consensus among states and unattainable logistical and financial requirements.⁵⁹ A choice was consequently made for a 'learning forum', in this way bypassing conventional structures and creating a network in which societal and state actors can engage in unconventional patterns of interaction.⁶⁰

The theory of transnationalism may, lastly, assist the discipline of public theology in reflecting on the role of the state in relating the local and the global. Local contexts indeed seem to be connected to and dependent on other (local) contexts in more ways than states can provide. This interconnection is especially clear when one considers the issues that local contexts are faced with; both a comprehensive understanding of their issues and adequate ways of addressing these issues necessarily open contexts to the particularities of other contexts. It therefore seems impossible to practise a truly local public theology without the practitioners of other truly local public theologies. This logic can be illustrated by the controversy surrounding Royal Dutch Shell's plans to use the process of hydraulic fracturing to release natural gas in the Karoo region of South Africa. The plans initially received a rather indifferent reception, but engagement with local communities in the Niger Delta quickly led to a public outcry also in the Karoo.⁶¹ This reaction also led to the participation of political

⁵⁷) P. Lacy, T. Cooper, R. Hayward and L. Neuberger, 'The New Era of Sustainability: UN Global Compact-Accenture CEO Study 2010', *Accenture*, <<http://www.accenture.com/us-en/Pages/insight-new-era-sustainability-summary.aspx>> [accessed 12 April 2012].

⁵⁸) John Ruggie, 'global_governance.net: The Global Compact as Learning Network', *Global Governance*, 7 (2001), 371–8 at 372.

⁵⁹) *Ibid.*, 373.

⁶⁰) *Ibid.*

⁶¹) I-Net Bridge, 'Shell Plans R1.4 bln Karoo Exploration, 28 March 2011', *Business Report*, paras 1–16, <<http://www.iol.co.za/business/companies/shell-plans-r1-4-bln-karoo-exploration-1.1048016?pageNumber=2>> [accessed 7 September 2011].

groups,⁶² and soon the South African government imposed a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in the Karoo.⁶³

It may well be challenging to continue to understand local issues comprehensively and in a complex manner, and to continue to engage in open dialogue with other groupings, including those whose convictions may be profoundly different. However, such attempts can strengthen attempts to experiment with descriptions that transcend and even challenge state-centric categories; it might also enable further innovative and constructive networks of dialogue and cooperation. Theoretically the practitioners of public theology—driven by sources that fundamentally transcend the categories and influence of the state—are ideally positioned to engage in such dialogue.

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⁶² Sapa, 'Put Karoo Fracking on Hold, Says DA, 1 February 2011', *Times LIVE*, paras 1–8, <<http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article887209.ece/Put-Karoo-fracking-on-hold-says-DA>> [accessed 7 September 2011].

⁶³ Ruona Agbroko, 'S. Africa Imposes 'Fracking' Moratorium in Karoo, 21 April 2011', *Reuters*, paras 1–15, <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/04/21/us-safrica-fracking-idUKTRE73K45620110421>> [accessed 7 April 2011].