

Pathways from the Pandemic: Africa's Missing Barn Doors*

What's out there is darkness, uncertainty, decline, and recession.

Jerry Brown, Former Governor of California¹

We don't prepare ourselves for a single problem, we prepare ourselves for problems that sometimes create their own momentum.

Warren R. Buffett, Chairman and CEO, Berkshire Hathaway²

"No handful of facile formulas can overcome Africa's travail. No single observer is likely to have sufficient breadth of perspective or vision to propound a definitive charter for future resurrection".

M. Crawford Young³

Bells are tolling for anticipated infections and fatalities in Africa from the Covid-19 pandemic, and increased poverty caused by the global recession and lockdowns. Much attention will be devoted to flattening the curve of infections in a continent whose economic growth rate is already flattened. Indeed, the gains in socio-economic development over a quarter-century is imperiled as a consequence of the pandemic and the added burdens placed on fragile institutions.⁴

In the midst of the avalanche of reports, AfricaCLI will remain focused on the objectives in its Mission Statement. Of particular importance is the call by Matthew Page for a "conceptual change" in how academic institutions operate.⁵ Today's multiplex crisis, while bringing unprecedented challenges, also provides opportunities to transform a wide range of dysfunctional institutions and overhaul failed policies.

The edited volume by Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young, *Beyond State Crisis?*, merits renewed attention. Reflections on Young after his passing on January 22, 2020 led me to reread my contribution to that volume. An excerpt from the final paragraph shows its continued pertinence.

*Dedicated to the memory of M. Crawford Young and Thandika Mkandawire

¹ Governor Brown anticipated in January 2018 a plunge in state revenues after years of building "a rainy-day fund". He could not anticipate that a highly contagious virus would push the state over the "cliff", and not the familiar heavy rains or wildfires. It is a boon to his successor, Gavin Newsom, to have inherited \$17 billion in reserves. See Miriam Pawel, "Can Gavin Newsom Meet the Moment?" *The New York Times*, April 20, 2020. In Africa, the inquiry would be about where those funds went. Nigeria is currently seeking \$7 billion in loans to cover its fiscal deficit. It should combine that search with getting wealthy citizens to return some of the substantial funds they have sequestered abroad.

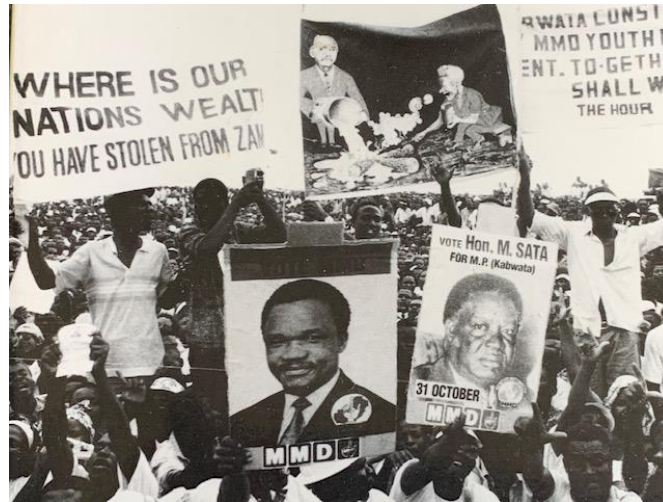
² Andrew Ross Sorkin, "Buffett's Uncertainty Sends Unsettling Message," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2020.

³ This remark by Prof. Young was quoted in the letter of invitation to the inaugural seminar of the African Governance Program of The Carter Center December 19, 1988.

⁴ For a probing discussion of the economic challenges posed by the pandemic and the global recession for Africa, and steps taken (and proposed) to increase the needed financial resources, see a conversation on May 2, 2020 between economist David Dollar and Brahim Coulibaly, outgoing Director of Brookings' Africa Growth Initiative and its newly-appointed Vice President of Global Development: <https://www.brookings.edu/series/dollar-and-sense-podcast/>

⁵ See www.africaCLI.org. I will take up in a future document the failure of the Academy to respond to non-developmental governance in Africa and its crippling consequences. For an earlier essay, see "Africa's Predicament and Academe," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 7, 2003.

Three decades after Aristide Zolberg identified the precarious nature of the post-colonial order in Africa, an effective state is perhaps the continent's most glaring deficiency... At the beginning of the 1990s, many students of Africa (including this author) believed that democratization would pull the continent into a virtuous cycle of renewed development. In retrospect, we put aside too quickly what we learned from the mid-1980s about the factors and forces contributing to state erosion. That issue has now pushed its way to the forefront of our analyses.⁶



1991 Zambian Election Campaign, Photo Courtesy of Anthony Allison

Another two decades later, this “glaring deficiency” has put millions of Africans at risk of diminished livelihood, severe illness, and painful death. Spikes in extreme poverty and hunger are predicted. “The factors and forces contributing to state erosion” have left core institutions ill equipped to respond to the pandemic and economic downturn.⁷ A well-known phrase comes to mind: “It is better to close the barn doors *before*, not after, the animals have fled.” But what to do when the barn doors are rotted, been devoured, or both.⁸

Wale Adebaniwi’s searing book on the anti-corruption struggle in Nigeria is entitled *Authority Stealing*.⁹ But that was the international edition. The earlier Nigerian edition had a more provocative title: *Paradise for Maggots*.¹⁰ Matthew Page has traced how paragons of this “paradise” invest pilfered funds

⁶ “War, State-making, and Democracy in Africa” in Mark. R. Beissinger and Crawford Young, *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective* (2002). The reference is to Zolberg’s *Creating Political Order: The Party-States of West Africa* (1966). Among Young’s important writings is his *magnum opus*, *The State in Post-Colonial Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960-2020* (2012).

⁷ See a brief commentary by Ruth Maclean on the acute challenges facing Angola and Nigeria, both highly dependent on petroleum exports. *The New York Times*, April 22, 2020. Isabel dos Santos, daughter of Angola’s longtime ruler, José Eduardo dos Santos - and reputedly the richest woman in Africa - has become the poster person for dynastic kleptocracy. “Earning Riches by Exploiting a Poor Nation,” *The New York Times*, January 20, 2020.

⁸ I have quoted in an earlier statement Nicolas van de Walle’s report on how reserves of maize were established in Malawi. When the next drought came, the supply had been plundered. A remark by Professor Adigun Agbaje of the University of Ibadan a decade ago continues to resonate: “You don’t realize how far the rot has gone”. The development economist, William Easterly, famously related how a Nigerian pointed out a bridge that could not be seen. The money allocated for it had been pocketed.

⁹ *Authority Stealing: Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria* (Carolina Academic Press, 2012). The title is taken from a song by Fela Ransome-Kuti.

¹⁰ *A Paradise for Maggots: The Story of a Nigerian Anti-Graft Czar* (2010).

in high-end properties in London and other major cities. Recently, he reported that Dubai has become a favorite destination for lodging the wealth of Nigerian political elites.¹¹ It is not hard to imagine the schools, roads, clean water, electricity, and public health systems – what I call *social wealth* - that could have been created and maintained with these fugitive funds.¹²

“Corruption is destroying Nigeria” is how the Nigerian media reported Toyin Falola’s governance lecture in July 2019.¹³ Falola, in effect, carried forward the arguments made by former U.S. President Barack Obama in *his* governance address in Accra, Ghana a decade earlier. As a U.S. senator, Obama’s talk at the University of Nairobi in August 2006 was also spot on. He decried the “corrosion from within” and termed the struggle to reduce it, “The Fight of Our Time”.¹⁴



Lt to Rt Toyin Falola, Syl Whitaker, R. Joseph, and Peter Ekeh
Madison, Wisconsin, November 1995

We are now truly in *A Global Fight*. African and other countries subjected to years of “corrosion from within” discover that hospitals have no ventilators or even basic supplies and medications. Often, patients have to procure these necessities before being treated. A description of Lebanon’s clientelistic politics and their socio-economic consequences would be familiar in much of Africa:

“...a system that has enriched the political elite while failing to build a stable economy or provide basics like reliable running water or consistent waste management.”¹⁵

¹¹ “Dubai Property: An Oasis for Nigeria’s Corrupt Political Elites,” The Carnegie Endowment, March 13, 2020. This practice has long been true of family members of other African leaders. Similar investigations have been carried out by Global Witness, The National Resources Governance Institute, and Enough! led by John Prendergast and the actor George Clooney.

¹² For a detailed analysis of Illicit Financial Flows from sub-Saharan Africa - estimated to be \$1.3 trillion between 1980 and 2018 - see Landry Signé, Mariama Sow, and Payce Madden: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Illicit-financial-flows-in-Africa.pdf>. Since foreign direct investments in Africa during that same period was \$2 trillion, illicit outflows was two-thirds that figure.

¹³ “Governance, Citizenship, and the Nigerian State,” delivered at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ogun State, Nigeria, July 4, 2019.

¹⁴ They include lectures in Abuja and Kano, Nigeria, largely devoted to corruption by Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, secretaries of state in the Obama Administration.

¹⁵ Vivian Yee and Hwaida Saad, “To Make Sense of Lebanon’s Threat, Follow the Garbage Trail,” *The New York Times*, December 4, 2019. The resumption of protests in Lebanon in April 2020, expressing the same anger as in

In response to the 2019 Global Social Protest Movement - over the inadequate supply of public goods and services - a study of Governance and the Supply of Public Services (GSPS) was considered. When this idea was shared with a longtime colleague, Emeritus Professor Willard R. Johnson of MIT, he responded by bending over and seizing his throat. It took a few moments to realize what he was conveying: *GASPS*. Neither of us could foresee that, within a few months, millions worldwide would be struggling, as a result of Covid-19, to *breathe*. The pandemic and recession in Africa are unusually daunting, and not just because of poor health services and the paucity of personal protection and medical equipment.¹⁶ The global recession is battering African economies *ahead* of the rise in Covid-19 infections. The downward trend is boosted as a consequence of the lockdowns.¹⁷

Conceptual Change Agenda

Following a brainstorming session at the U.S. African Studies Association annual meeting in November 2018, remarks received from Matthew Page were incorporated in the AfricaCLI Mission Statement. There was an urgent need, he said, to bridge gaps in institutional capacities. His call for a “conceptual change” resonated. Such a search is underway, even in economically-advanced countries.¹⁸ “We can’t go back to doing things the way we did” is often heard, especially regarding healthcare systems, low-paid and insecure employment, and thin safety-nets.

“We are in this together” is also a common phrase. But what does “together” mean in countries with political systems whose core premise is the cultivation of sectional identities of ethnicity, language, religion, and class (or an amalgam of these)? Will African economies remain hostage to “you chop I chop” prebendalist behaviors? Will a “conceptual change” occur regarding the use and allocation of state revenues?¹⁹ It is not enough to identify a desirable “conceptual change” but also explore how it can (to use a favorite Nigerian expression) be *actualized*? How will Biodun Jeyifo’s summons, *Against the Predator’s Republic*, be translated into concrete action?²⁰ How will the siphoning of public revenues by

2019, is a harbinger of what can occur elsewhere as “lock-downs” disproportionately impact the poor and economically insecure.

¹⁶ The disparity among African countries in their capacity to respond to the pandemic is also significant. South Africa’s public health system is more resilient than most. It has learned from the disastrous response by its political leaders to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/05/01/this-is-south-africas-third-major-pandemic-100-years-it-has-learned-its-lessons/>

¹⁷ Joe Parkinson and Benoit Faucon, “Oil Slump and Coronavirus Creates a Perfect Storm for Nigeria’s Economy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 28, 2020. In the case of Nigeria’s second largest city, Kano, difficulty of access to even substandard health services appears to have caused an alarming rise in mortality. Abiy Ahmed, Ethiopia’s reformist prime minister, has called for “a moratorium on bilateral and commercial debt repayments” so these resources can be redirected to alleviate health and financial problems. “Cancel Poor Nations’ Debt”, *The New York Times*, May 1, 2020. He makes a strong argument. The question is where will those cancelled payments be “redirected”.

¹⁸ Even the American “small government, free-market brand of conservatism” is sensing the winds-of-change. Jeremy W. Peters, “New Schism Shakes the Republican Faith in a Supreme Market,” *The New York Times*, May 7, 2020.

¹⁹ Matthew Page makes the telling argument that, with oil companies not able to sell but also store crude petroleum sourced from Nigeria, governmental structures, long predicated on oil revenues, will be “unsustainable”. Parkinson and Faucon, *op.cit.*

²⁰ Carolina Academic Press, 2016.

political elites to invest in property markets overseas be reversed? How can building *social wealth* be prioritized. ²¹ In brief, *what are the pathways to a salutary post-pandemic order in Africa?*



Robert L. Joseph, Farm and Barn, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Ideas to Consider

I) An Effective State

Italy's Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, in the midst of mounting fatalities, declared: "the state is here". "No Italians should feel abandoned." The measures taken by his government "were concrete evidence of the presence of the state".²² He sounded like the captain of a shuddering ship in a mighty storm. In Greece, a largely successful response to the pandemic elicited gratitude: "I felt pride that there is a state."²³

The term "effective" as concerns state systems has largely receded from the lexicon of African political studies. "Inefficacious", "predatory", even "absent" are adjectives more frequently heard.²⁴ *Bringing the State Back In* is the intriguing title of an influential book.²⁵ Resurrecting a viable, accountable, and efficacious state in Africa – once a vibrant topic of academic and

²¹ Larry Diamond and Bruce Mosbacher once called for by-passing government agencies and distributing petroleum revenues directly to the people. "Petroleum to the People: Africa's Coming Resource Curse and How to Avoid It", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October, 2013. As inspiring as such visions may appear, it would be *difficult* preventing such policies from being nullified, and revenues re-appropriated, by political elites. Moreover, as Falola argues, the poor often resort to ravaging their own environment – forests, water-tables, petroleum pipelines, electricity cables, wildlife – as survival strategies. A photograph shows our son, Robert, in front of the farm of the University of Ibadan once used for veterinary research and also the sale of meat products. The farm, the barns, the animals, and the attractive fence are all gone. The curve of pilferage exceeded that of viability, just as it did for the university library, bookstore, and other assets.

²² *The New York Times*, March 22, 2020. The "Washington Consensus" of the 1990s, and austerity policies – both premised on a reduced role for the state in the provision of public services – now haunt countries whose health systems cannot rise to the challenge of Covid-19 prevention and care.

²³ Pavlos Eleftheriadis, quoted in Iliana Magra, "Expecting Worst, Off-Troubled Greece Defied the Odds," *The New York Times*, April 30, 2020.

²⁴ The study of the state in Africa has yielded innovative analyses. During this period of disruption, "fetching" from this armory should be an important dimension of the work ahead. For example, Wale Adebawale and Ebenezer Obadare's edited book, *Encountering the Nigerian State*, is provocative as well as highly informative. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Discussions of the "irresponsible and unresponsive" state, especially in relation to the "abject" – those cast off – are compelling.

²⁵ Authored by T. Skocpol, P. Evans, and D. Rueschemeyer, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

political debates – must be resumed. In countries worldwide, a “conceptual shift” is underway regarding state, economy, and society. It is recalled how “big spending packages like the Marshall Plan” helped western countries rebound after WW II.²⁶ Government investment in public health and social protection, in Britain, France, and other European countries, is now being proposed by market-favoring government leaders.

II) **Dynamic and Competent Leadership**

As government, corporate, and civic institutions come under unprecedented challenge, thoughtful commentaries are being written about leadership. Past crises are evoked to show how government leaders – Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and others – steered beleaguered countries through catastrophes.²⁷ Angela Merkel, whose leadership skills have long been acknowledged, has risen further in public esteem as she skillfully directed Germany’s Covid-19 response.

Across the U.S., many governors and mayors have competently stepped up to the challenges, in marked contrast to a disorienting and factionalized federal executive. Gina Raimondo, governor of the small northeastern state of Rhode Island, has taken an aggressive but systematic approach. “It is a test of leadership”, she said, “to lead citizens through anxiety and assure them that it is in their best interest to follow the rules.”²⁸ It helps when these rules are designed on the basis of science and data, and their presentation is coherent and persuasive.²⁹ The following remark by Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka applies to many African countries in addition to his native Nigeria: “There is overabundant leadership quality locked up in the nation. It is a collective shortcoming that political space has not been sufficiently opened to let soar such potential”.³⁰ Perhaps an outcome of the Covid-19 crisis is that political space will be now widened and African politics no longer evoke comparisons with “racketeering”.³¹

III) **Government and Public Administration**

This “how governing should work” is how regular consultations by Ohio State governor Mike DeWine and the mayors of city governments was described. The aim is to coordinate their responses to the pandemic. It is a revelation that elected officials, from different political parties and at different levels of government, can cooperate effectively to address the pandemic.³² This

²⁶ In contrast to the richer countries, the poorer “South” is unable to generate large stimulus packages. A long queue is growing of those seeking assistance from the IMF and other international agencies. See the article on the resurgence of global poverty by Maria Abi-Habib in *The New York Times*, March 1, 2020.

²⁷ Jon Meacham, “The Long View: Leadership in a Time of Crisis”, *The New York Times*, April 19, 2020.

²⁸ Interview on U.S. National Public Radio (NPR), May 3, 2020.

²⁹ It is a delight, in my home state of Illinois, to listen to daily briefings on the pandemic by Governor Jay Pritzker and his associates. It is perhaps how citizens listened to radio broadcasts during the Second World War. There seems to be a national seminar underway, conducted via daily briefings by informed and articulate political leaders and public health experts.

³⁰ Quoted by Ayo Olukotun, “Harvesting the Insights of Election Discourse” *The Punch* (Lagos), March 7, 2018.

³¹ The “racketeering” analogy, referring to U.S. criminal statutes, was made by Bill Berkeley in *The Graves are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa* (Basic Books, 2001).

³² A noted exception has been New York Governor Andrew Cuomo and Bill de Blasio, Mayor of New City. They often seem more concerned with one-upmanship than statesmanship.

inspiring approach is seen across the U.S. and no doubt in other countries. The Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP) was established in 2016 with this same mission: “making government work”. NexTier, another Nigerian policy center, has brought together an impressive group of participants from government, business, and civic organizations to collaborate on policy issues. Comparable entities across the continent can be linked, and strengthened, in partnership with their international counterparts. Such a network can play a major role in *Pathways from the Pandemic*.

Henry Bienen, former president of Northwestern University, reminds us that public administration was once a major area of study in post-colonial Africa.³³ The field lost its luster with the decline in the performance of public officials and disruptive politics over successive decades. This trend should be reversed. How do governments and administrations *actually* work? Where have they improved the welfare of citizens, and how was this accomplished?³⁴ What effective methods and salutary policies were discovered? These questions bring to the fore the work of such centers as *Innovations for Successful Societies* (Princeton), the *J.F. Kennedy School of Government* (Harvard), the *Blavatnik School of Government* (Oxford), and institutions with similar missions in Europe and Asia.

IV) **Constructive Restructuring**

As mentioned above, subnational governments have acquired more visibility as governors and mayors conduct daily briefings on the Covid-19 response. We have been reminded that a more confederal system could have been chosen for the U.S. government with the aim of achieving “more effective government”.³⁵ Major advances have been made in some African countries, such as Kenya, in devolving power to provincial units. The same is true of district councils in Ghana and provinces in South Africa. “Restructuring” has been a perennial topic of debate and dispute in Nigeria. However, calls for a “true federalism” – meaning one with a less dominant central government especially regarding the control and disbursement of petroleum revenues and policing – have been regularly fended off by Nigerian presidents.

The former governor of the largest state in the federation, Lagos, Bola Tinubu, battled with the central government during his tenure (1999 – 2007). He sought, in particular, to increase local authority in police affairs, the control of roads, and electric power generation. Today, he is a key actor behind *Operation Amotekun*, an entity proposed by the southwestern states to enhance security. In response to the pandemic, there can be more attention devoted to increasing local

³³ Drawn from a private conversation. Bienen is the author of important studies of Africa, including *Tanzania: Party Transformation and Economic Development* (Princeton University Press, 1970) and *Armies and Parties in Africa* (Africana Publishing Company, 1978).

³⁴ Kenya, which has generated important analyses of its prevalent, and often intricate, corruption has also been the focus of studies of influential public administrators and jurists. See David K. Leonard, *African Successes: Four Public Managers of Kenyan Rural Development* (University of California Press, 1991), and Jennifer A. Widner, *Francis Nyalai and the Road to Judicial Independence in Africa* (W.W. Norton, 2001). The public survey methods honed by AfroBarometer could be used to generate such information. Its past reports can be a source of pertinent information. I am reminded of the outstanding Nigerian public officials interviewed in 1978-79. Their careers spanned the late colonial and early independence eras. My notes would have important information and insights.

³⁵ Richard Kreitner, “A More Perfect Kind of Union”, *The New York Times*, April 20, 2020.

and regional capacities throughout the continent. Reports of past commissions and conferences on reforming governing systems can be revisited. How local units of government can become arenas for innovative programs, rather than loci for “sharing” revenues that trickle down from federal and state treasuries, would be a top agenda item.³⁶

V) Composing Backwards

Chess masters allegedly do it. The Apollo 11 trip to the moon, an iconic event of universal significance, demonstrates it. The American composer, Elliott Carter (1908-2012), reportedly used it in his compositions. What it involves is envisioning the destination and plotting the optimal route to it. With regard to institution-building in Africa, so much that is intended in public policy gets lost in the implementation. In the July 2019 lecture mentioned earlier, Falola described several agencies established to work on environmental issues. So much duplication occurs that, eventually, policies are incoherent.³⁷

It would be interesting to see how a composing backward approach could be applied in particular contexts, accompanied by monitoring, evaluation, learning, and course corrections.³⁸ In 2014, with robust support from the Gates Foundation, Nigerian public health officials designed a way to stop an Ebola outbreak, confounding those who expected a huge increase in persons infected as occurred elsewhere in West Africa. What was learned from this experience? How was it applied outside this salutary experience? How is it being utilized in addressing the Covid 19 pandemic?

VI) Trust and Togetherness

Social trust and community can be enhanced when citizens recognize that they are truly “all in this together”. There is a narrow window as conventional lines of social division are overridden by an infection that does not discriminate among identity groups. This was a sentiment expressed during the 2019 Global Social Protest Movement. The pursuit of citizenship has been

³⁶ Efforts to explore regional approaches to growth and development in Nigeria, for example led by Patrick Utomi and his Center for Values in Leadership (CVL), has generated lively conferences but with little apparent concrete follow-up. The same is true of a “Monitoring Initiative on Nigerian Development and Security” (MINDS) that failed to gain traction. It was proposed in a conference at Northwestern’s Center for Transportation (NUTC) in 2017. MINDS can be resuscitated in a climate more favorable to “thinking outside the box” of the Nigerian post-1999 government system. In that year, the country returned to elected and constitutional government after fourteen years of military rule.

³⁷ Kelly Spence, who formerly worked for the Center for International Enterprise (CIPE), describes in a co-authored article how taxes are haphazardly imposed by different federal and state agencies. R. Joseph, K. Spence, and A. Agboluaje, “Corporate Social Responsibility and Latecomer Industrialization in Nigeria” in C. Walker-Said and J.D. Kelly, eds. *Human Rights in the New Global Economy: Corporate Social Responsibility* (University of Chicago Press, 2015).

³⁸ All this might seem very basic, but basic can be complexified for no logical reasons. An attempt was made to engage noted scholars in the Stanford’s Design School (D-School) to create a demonstration project in Nigeria. This effort never went beyond the speculation stage. If accompanied by stricter controls on corruption, such projects would be cost-effective purely from avoiding the wastage of huge sums. The end result of producing quality public goods and services would, of course, be revolutionary. Despite its deplorable human rights record, the Rwanda government is far ahead of other African countries in applying systematic approaches to project design and implementation.

a major challenge in Africa's plural nations. The transcending of these lines, for example regarding electricity supply in Ghana in the lead-up to the 2016 national elections, is a harbinger of what is possible during the interwoven crises of 2020. ³⁹

VII) Social Democracy

By whatever name it is called, social democracy is again on the agenda in many nations. A well-funded and managed public health system, social protections, a strong-safety net, the curbing of widening gaps in income and wealth, these and similar priorities reflect a re-ordering of the intellectual landscape. Neo-liberal nostrums on marketization and "state retreat", which have prevailed during the past three decades, are challenged anew. A revisiting of the words and works of Africa's leading social democrats, such as Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, can contribute to the conceptual change agenda. Re-emerging from hibernation are such notions as the "social contract", and state systems that mitigate rather than accentuate disparities in power and wealth.



Thandika Mkandawire

Journalist Michelle Goldberg describes the conceptual change in socio-economic policies that can be spurred by the current "calamity": "Now, with so many of our assumptions about the way our country works collapsing around us, it's progressives stepping forward with a set of answers they've been refining for years."⁴⁰ Her discussion of opportunities for greater social justice has global resonance. The real test, in the U.S. and elsewhere, is translating such ideas and visions into political alliances that can acquire power via electoral processes.

³⁹ This is an optimistic perspective. Peter Ekeh, Nigeria's outstanding political sociologist, commented during the arduous struggle to end military dictatorship in the 1990s that a collective response to tyranny eluded his fellow citizens. Bruce Berman has written perceptively on the significance of trust in the advance or obstruction of economic progress in Africa. His arguments are relevant to the extraordinary challenges confronted today. See "Capitalism Incomplete: State, Culture and the Politics of Industrialization," in W.J. Tetter, K.P. Pupilampu, and B. Berman, eds., *Critical Perspectives on Politics and Socio-Economic Development in Ghana* (Brill, 2003).

⁴⁰ "Is a New New Deal Coming?" *The New York Times*, May 3, 2020.

VIII) Embedded Knowledge



Prof. Haruna Wakili in the library of Mambayya House, University of Kano

Ayo Olukotun, the influential Nigerian professor of governance, has bewailed the failure of governments to draw on studies and reports conducted by the country's researchers. "Reach back and fetch" is an important commitment of AfricaCLI because many of the issues to be confronted are not new. It is interesting to read of advances made, for example, in tackling Covid-19 using technologies that identify existing drugs that may be effective against the coronavirus. In the files of philanthropic foundations long active in Africa, in university departments and research centers, and the knowledge bank of scholars and policy professionals reside bodies of knowledge that could be relevant to meet current challenges.⁴¹ Equally vital is the deep knowledge within African local communities. Such knowledge, according to Fallou Ngom, Director of African Studies at Boston University, usually remains outside the purview of development practitioners, both national and foreign.

IX) Institutions of Competence and Integrity

Francis Fukuyama has stressed the importance of institutions, and states as complexes of institutions. Yet, he admits, we often don't know where they come from. Some countries have them, and the capacity to maintain and improve them, and some countries do not.⁴² Some have them in particular sectors, for example in church communities and chieftaincy systems, but not

⁴¹ I am particularly aware of these untapped sources as a consequence of a long-association with faculty and students in African universities. In addition to teaching stints in Sudan and Nigeria (1974-75; 1976-1979), such experiences include a term as program officer of the Ford Foundation in West Africa (1986-1988) and as a Fellow of The Carter Center (1988-1994). Particularly informative was the collaborative work in Nigeria of the Research Alliance on HIV/AIDS (REACH) funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2005-2011). Emeritus Professor Akin Mobugunje of the University comes to mind. He currently serves as Chairman of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy. Such premier scholars were deeply involved in policy design and implementation at state, regional, and federal levels. Tapping their knowledge base would be profoundly important for designing *Pathways from the Pandemic*.

⁴² *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

in others within the same nation. We have posted on the AfricaCLI Forum a paper by Monica Prasad on “islands of integrity”. Here we focus on *Institutions of Competence and Integrity* (ICIs).



R. Joseph and Faculty in his former Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan

There is a metaphor tellingly used by Michael Bratton when he described the state in Africa as a “Mount Kilimanjaro... in the open plains”.⁴³ This metaphor can also be used to describe particular state or private institutions. I have observed the construction of one such remarkable institution from conception to realization: Ashesi University of Ghana. Ashesi has been ably led by its visionary founder, Patrick Awuah. While affording African youth unique opportunities to acquire a world-class education (without leaving the continent), much can be learned from Ashesi’s journey.

Building *Institutions of Competence and Integrity* is often underplayed in global development circles. While making the case for massive debt relief for Africa, for example, to meet the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, Ethiopia’s Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated that such assistance is needed, “not because we squandered the money, but because we need the resources to save lives and livelihoods.” Yet, pulling back the veil obscuring political corruption in his own country was one of his major actions after assuming leadership of the country in April 2019. For many distressed Africans, it would be a significant *conceptual change* if overseas aid and loans were not squandered, or pilfered, but truly directed to “save lives and livelihoods”.⁴⁴

X) Navigating Recovery

One of the greatest governmental challenges is underway in virtually every country in the world: How do you shut down economic activity and social interaction while maintaining enough of both so your economy can survive? And how do you permit the economy to re-open without provoking a rebound in infections?⁴⁵ Robert Rubin, the banker and former U.S. Treasury

⁴³ “Beyond the State: Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa”, *World Politics*, vol. 41, issue 3 (April 1989), p. 118. Paradoxically, this majestic mountain in Tanzania was used to describe the African state in relation to “alternative institutions” in society. In our reference, Ashesi and other ICIs are oases among anemic state institutions.

⁴⁴ “Cancel Poor Nations Debt,” *loc. cit.*

⁴⁵ There are further complexities: It is not a simple case of shutting down and then re-opening one time. As Rhode Island Governor Romano stated, locking down must permit essential social services to continue. Further, as the former director of the Centers of Disease Prevention and Control (CDC), Julie Hilberding, points out, there could be successive waves of infection, as with the 1918 pandemic, and therefore sequential closing and opening. In the

Secretary described these challenges as well as anyone can. Fortunate countries are those with the wealth to tap, or borrow, the institutional structures that can be efficient and nimble, officials with the right training and skills, and the political leadership that knows when to step forward and when to drop back and let the experts speak, plan, and implement.

The perfect storm of the pandemic and recession must be met by a perfect storm of institutional resilience, expert knowledge, and political acumen. There seems to be a trial of textbook policymaking taking place simultaneously in scores of national capitals and a multiplicity of sub-national entities. Armies prepare for such complex and uncertain scenarios but few governments do. Where in Africa will this facilitative combination of capacities emerge? It has been seen in Ghana in coping with the massive return of migrants from Nigeria in 1980, and in the operations of the Election Commission, especially during the chairmanship of Prof. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan. Perhaps managing post-war recovery, as in Liberia after the long and gruesome conflicts of the 1990s, would match the challenges facing governmental institutions and their external funders.⁴⁶

A consortium of research institutions in Africa and overseas can take up the opportunity of studying how the curb of infections was flattened while economic and societal institutions are nurtured to greater strength and responsiveness. Where were successes achieved? How did they differ from the failures, and why? This search has been on the agenda of most African countries as they raced to independence from colonial rule in the 1950s. It is again taking place in real time and at warp speed. “Experts across Europe had warned that closing down countries to contain the coronavirus pandemic would be far easier than opening them up again.”⁴⁷ Ayo Olukotun speaks of the “magnitude and depth of the problem” in Nigeria. The debilities of its economic system will not be overcome in short order, such as “the bureaucratic jungle that surrounds efforts to raise loans from our banks.”⁴⁸ To the swollen ranks of unemployed, and minimally employed, huge numbers are being added. What’s to be done when barn doors cannot be opened before they are rebuilt – and the same for bridges paid for but never constructed - in the midst of a 100-year storm?

XI) Planet Earth and the Pandemic

The novel coronavirus has accomplished what no other organism, human or otherwise, has achieved in this era. It is circumnavigating the globe and taking advantage of weaknesses in health and other systems. It is a demonstration of the selfish gene *par excellence*. We are

case of the state of Illinois, a framework is being designed to divide the state into regions, and then having several phases of gradual opening, each with different degrees of permissiveness and restriction. All this suggests an extraordinary level of governmental capacity, and societal trust, much beyond the capacity of most poor nations. *National Public Radio*, May 3, 2020.

⁴⁶ India is facing the horror of imposing a severe lockdown on its 1.3 billion people, followed by a removal of restrictions that create clustered targets for the coronavirus. J. Gettleman and K. Schultz, “Infections Jump in India as Its Streets Come Alive,” *The New York Times*, (May 7, 2020). Predictions of a second and even third wave of the pandemic, as in 1918, strains the imagination of how countries with low institutional capacity and low public trust in government will cope.

⁴⁷ *The New York Times*, May 3, 2020.

⁴⁸ Coronavirus and Pay-Cut Blues,” *The Punch*, May 7, 2020.

learning where strengths and weaknesses reside from mortality and morbidity statistics. A remark of Warren Buffett, the Sage of Omaha, is apt: “When the tide goes out, you see who is swimming naked”.⁴⁹ Most Africans, unlike in imperial photographs, are fully clothed, but the institutions that determine their healthcare, water supply, education, electricity, waste disposal, and transport may be threadbare.⁵⁰

The entire world is dialed today to one channel: Covid-19. For many years, I have heard a message that now tolls loudly. It is from Frank White, a former Oxford classmate and passionate expounder of “The Overview Effect”. This is the awesome view astronauts have from space. We sense some of it in the astounding photographs beamed back to earth. But it is difficult to convey what astronauts see and feel.⁵¹ All of planet earth, viewed through the windows of their spacecraft, is one piece of the unfathomable vastness of the cosmos.

Closer to earth, how humans are gnawing away at the grand Amazon forest can be fully seen and comprehended. So can the devastation of the Nigerian Delta by both legitimate and illegitimate oil extraction. Hundreds of satellites roam the world, and they can show the desertification in the Sahara and Sahel zone of Africa that would be virtually impossible to capture on the ground. They can reveal details of urbanization, over-population, and the reverse trend as fear of the coronavirus and alarm at government lockdowns induce processes of reverse migration to rural refuges.

Africa, as the birthplace of humanity, can contribute significantly to designing strategies to outwit the virus and rebuild economies. Redrawn maps show how large the continent is and how centrally it is located on our globe. Whose Moment will this be is a question that regularly comes up. *Pathways from the Pandemic* is based on the premise that this could also be Africa’s Moment, that is, if its leaders - governmental, civic, religious, corporate, communal, and others – recognize the vital role they can play in overcoming, and moving beyond, the pandemic. The struggle is not just global but planetary. There is data being collected from space that can be mined to meet this unprecedented challenge.

XII) Thunbirds and Technology

“The young people are our hope”, stated Stephen Bergman, the noted author and psychiatrist in an online conversation.⁵² I call this generation, “Thunbirds”, from Greta Thunberg, the 17-year Swedish environmental leader, and the legendary Sankofa Bird of the Akan peoples of Ghana. They see the world differently and their brains are networked differently from being exposed to communications technology from a young age.⁵³ They have a critical role to play in virtually all aspects of the “conceptual change agenda” mentioned in this document.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Thomas Friedman in “Make America Immune Again,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2020.

⁵⁰ Many discover to their surprise, on revisiting African institutions and localities they had once known, what was quoted earlier from Prof. Agbaje: “How far the rot has gone”.

⁵¹ Frank White has recorded interviews to capture these experiences in their own words.

⁵² Under the pseudonym Samuel Shem, Bergman is the author of the influential satirical novel, *House of God* (1978) based on his experiences of American medical training. A sequel, *Man’s 4th Best Ho\$pital* (Barnes and Noble, 2019), turned out to be uniquely timed for the dismay over America’s medical enterprise.

⁵³ Perhaps comparable to children who acquire fluency in multiple languages.

No one knows what “the other side” of the interwoven global crises will look like. For Thunbirds, envisioning different futures, and identifying bridges to their realization, come naturally to their “wired” brains. They can connect readily with their counterparts anywhere in the world via their shared skills in computer and Internet technologies. A slum, a landscape devastated by artisanal oil mining, or desiccated farmland, can be examined through satellite images and, using virtual reality devices, be transformed into healthy environments. “Composing backwards” can then come into play. The technology needed for this practice already exists. I do not know about the potentialities I don’t know, but the Thunbirds would know them.⁵⁴



Freedom Gates Project, Summer 2018

The money to pay for it? Apart for a handful of student summer stipends, nothing has been spent so far to establish AfricaCLI.org and build an online Network for the Study on Governance and Development. As for barn doors, the Thunbirds would find a way to design barns without them, or better protect them where they exist. Having worked closely with members of this generation, I know there is little that exceed their capacity to envision and design. As Soyinka stated, we just have to unleash this immense potential.

Stormy Present, Uncertain Future

On May 6, as this text was being completed, a column appeared by Thomas L. Friedman, the well-known journalist and author.⁵⁵ It dovetailed so much with the thoughts and arguments in this document that a few sentences deserve quoting:

“We as a country have weakened so many sources of our strength”.

“We need high social trust in order to have a coordinated response...”

“The ones who survive [natural disasters like pandemics] have one thing in common. They are the most adaptive at generating the chemistry, biology, and physics needed to meet the challenge.”

I sighed on reading the last sentence. It reminded me of Ikenna Onyido, a first-rate professor of chemistry - and an individual of outstanding personal attributes - who joined the University of Ibadan at exactly the same time I did in early 1976. He and other science scholars kept up their professional work

⁵⁴ One of my grandchildren, a 16-year sophomore in high school, builds and upgrades his own computers and, for fun, creates online video games. Another, also 16, is taking all her courses while in high school at a major American public university. She will graduate from high school with a College degree in sciences I can barely comprehend.

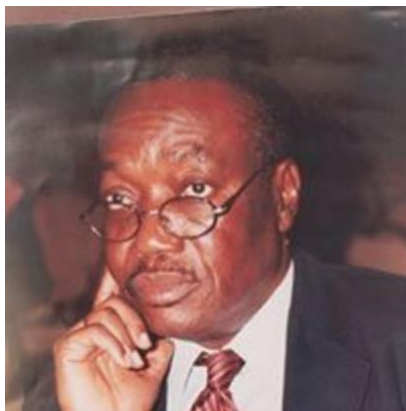
⁵⁵ “Make America Immune Again,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2020.

through stints in overseas laboratories. But they were committed to Nigeria and to pursuing university careers in their home nation. They experienced, however, the downward slide as the number of universities and other entities in higher education mushroomed, largely for political reasons. Standards dropped sharply as a result of the unplanned, and precariously financed, expansion plus the “missing doors” phenomena.⁵⁶

Two decades after we first met, Onyido sent me a poignant letter together with his impressive *curriculum vitae* of scientific publications. It also included the list of administrative positions he had assumed to help build operational as well as intellectual capacity. However, he was ready to throw in the towel and seek a university position overseas.⁵⁷



**Dr. Ikenna Onyido, Lecturer,
University of Ibadan**



**Emeritus
Professor Onyido**

Onyido is emblematic of Nigerians, and Africans elsewhere – the “overabundant leadership quality locked up in the nation” as Wole Soyinka observed - whose potential could not “soar” at home. Many left as their hopes of a frontline career in their disciplines wilted. Often, they were obliged to take up appointments in low-ranking colleges and universities overseas. Heavy teaching duties and low remuneration meant they would never fulfill their potential. There have been exceptions, however, like Onyido who remained at home but refused to lower their professional standards. Although their potential was now “locked up in the nation”, their narratives can be distilled to inspire the Thunbird generation.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ These phenomena are commonly referred to as “the Nigerian factor”. I have used different terms to describe it, such as “toll-gate society”. A sad demonstration of its practices can be seen in the quarantine-until-payment tactic in Kenya. Abdi Latif Dahir “Confined to Quarantine and Paying to Be Let Out,” *The New York Times*, May 8, 2020.

⁵⁷ I was limited in the assistance I could provide. I did share his letter and CV with a senior Dartmouth College professor of Chemistry. That initiative, unfortunately, did not yield hopeful suggestions.

⁵⁸ Another scholar-leader in this mold was another Ibadan colleague, Oyeleye Oyediran (1934-2018), a professor of politics and public administration. Onyido, an Igbo from southeastern Nigeria, had moved from international-level research to being the Dean of a University of Agriculture in Benue State in the Middle-Belt region (from where he contacted me over two decades ago). He subsequently held university presidencies in states – Abia and Anambra - in his ethnic home region. Onyido became a bold critic of lowered operational standards in Nigerian higher education and the *professional and ethical mores* of university faculty.

Here is a report of Onyido's frank words as he bid farewell in 2019 as an Emeritus Professor from his last university presidency:

Former Vice Chancellor Prof. Ikenna Onyido expressed regrets over the dominance of mediocrities in the nation's university system. University education has fallen greatly compared to what was obtainable in the 1960s and 1970s. "Mediocrities have taken over the nation's university system and many who have no business being in the system dominate. The nation's university education has degenerated so badly that many professors cannot do serious academic work. Most people in the universities have no business being there but were brought in because of the rot in the country."⁵⁹

No one knows as well as intrepid scholars like Ikenna Onyido how and why his people are so vulnerable to the pandemic and socio-economic dislocations. There is, in fact, little about the "conceptual change agenda" that he and others have not espoused since we first met over four decades ago. The visions we shared around the swimming pool in the Ibadan Staff Club have dimmed.⁶⁰



Sons and Swimming Pool, University of Ibadan

A new generation must take up the torch. Abraham Lincoln's immortal words in the Second Annual Address to Congress on December 1, 1862, resound loudly. The need for a "conceptual change agenda" has seldom been so eloquently and powerfully expressed:

The dogmas of the quiet past, are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Crawford Young's Lincolnesque remarks set the tone for the inaugural seminar of the African Governance Program in 1989. Three decades later, they could similarly help launch *Pathways from the Pandemic*.

"No handful of facile formulas can overcome Africa's travail. No single observer is likely to have sufficient breadth of perspective or vision to propound a definitive charter for future resurrection".

⁵⁹ "Mediocrities Dominating Our Universities," *The Nation* (Lagos), May 24, 2019.

⁶⁰ Just as the water in that swimming pool was emptied decades ago and not replaced. See photo taken in the late 1970s.

The Other Side

The last words are given to an optimistic scenario depicted by Brahim Coulibaly, Vice President of Global Development, The Brookings Institution, and studies of *resilience and stringency*. Here is Coulibaly's conclusion in the podcast with David Dollar on May 4, 2020:

*The positive scenario would be that the number of [Covid-19] cases remain relatively low; that there are other factors which enable African countries to resist better or recover faster from the coronavirus. In this case, I could foresee that economies recover faster, human casualties are limited, and advanced economies make progress in their own recoveries and a vaccine is forthcoming. These improvements, and limited casualties within Africa, would create the environment for boosting economic recovery faster than projected.*⁶¹

Perhaps the silver lining Coulibaly glimpsed among the dark clouds will appear in other dimensions of the pandemic and recession. Echoing his suppositions are insights from ongoing research programs. They focus on *resilience and stringency*.⁶² Resilience is defined “as a person or society doing well in spite of experiencing acute stress or long-term adversity...The positive outcomes rely on citizens believing the measures a government is taking are appropriate, leading to trust and compliance.” Greece and Croatia are cited as such examples of mitigating the pandemic. Scholars at the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University have devised a “stringency scale” to compare degrees of stringency imposed on different populations, and how safely and sustainably these can be eased. It turns out that some smaller and poorer European nations have imposed tougher restrictions, and earlier, and suffered the lowest Covid-19 casualties. The decisive factors appeared to be “deep reservoirs of resilience born of relatively recent hardship”.

These perspectives, backed up by research findings, are highly pertinent to the “conceptual changes” needed in Africa. They exemplify “reach back and fetch” from social and cultural repertoires. In some areas – such as public health systems – African countries may be very deficient; but in others they may have deep resources waiting to be tapped. While the design of pathways beyond the pandemic can benefit from universal models, also to be tapped is the resilience gained locally from overcoming calamities and coping with anemic services, predation, and poverty.



Students of Community High School, Samonda, Oyo State, Nigeria

⁶¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/series/dollar-and-sense-podcast/> These remarks, taken from the transcript of the podcast, have been slightly edited.

⁶² Matina Stevis-Gridneff, “Disciplined by Hard Past, Poorer Nations of Europe Show Resilience in Virus Fight”, *The New York Times*, May 11, 2020. Lead scholars cited are Thomas Hale of the Blavatnik School and Frosso Motti-Stefanidi of the University of Athens.