

Beyond the Pandemic and the Predicament

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While preparing to disseminate the document, “Pathways from the Pandemic: Africa’s Missing Barn Doors”, I kept writing “predicament” for “pandemic”. Some readers might have noticed the slip in posts on AfricaCLI.org. The struggle to keep the two words separate is now over: the Covid-19 pandemic and the African predicament, from our perspective, have merged.¹

Efforts to mitigate the pandemic require coping with well-known aspects of the post-colonial predicament, as is the case with many relief and development programs in the continent. The key question is: While seeking to curb the former, will pathways be uncovered to mitigate the latter? As stated in “Pathways”, the search for “a salutary post-pandemic political order” is underway. Crawford Young described this quest three decades ago as seeking “a charter for future resurrection”.² Mathew Page described it recently as the pursuit of a “conceptual change agenda”.

We have moved in less than two years from considering a *Collaborative Learning Initiative* - drawing on an immersive research project with Northwestern students - to focusing on the challenge of *Governance and the Supply of Public Services*.³ Before this study could be launched, however, it became evident that a novel coronavirus was circumnavigating the globe. It is now cutting a swath through poorer nations in the southern hemisphere. Significant responses to the current crises, and vignettes on the challenges, will be made available in a newly-created space on Africa.CLI.org.⁴

The many references to Nigeria would be noted in “Pathways”. This fact should not be surprising in view of my long association with Africa’s most populous nation. In association with several Nigerian colleagues, a national project is being explored. It will coincide with events to mark my 75th birthday on September 16, 2020.

Much will be done in the near term by health experts to reduce the prevalence of Covid-19. In parallel, we will focus on a different kind of “herd immunity” needed to overcome predatory governance and repair corroded institutions. Ayo Olukotun summarized this challenge well: it is the search for pathways from “lamentation to remedial action”.⁵

¹ I have spoken on many occasions about Africa’s, and Nigeria’s, predicament. See essays and talks posted on Arch Library, Northwestern University’s Open Access Repository. Stanislav Andreski’s predictions about autocracy, the political and economic behaviors of post-colonial elites, and kleptocracy have, sadly, proven to be prescient. See *The African Predicament: A Study in the Pathology of Modernization* (New York: Atherton Press, 1968).

² It is disheartening to recall that Young’s introduction to this quest took place in the Republic of Congo. In addition to his influential writings on that country’s political travails, he served for a period as Dean of Social Sciences in the University of Lubumbashi.

³ The pertinent papers can be found under the Documents tab of AfricaCLI.org.

⁴ See <https://www.africacli.org/africatoday>.

⁵ Similarly, Timothy Egan, cited in “Pathways”, calls the challenge “a reset” in major policy areas. Echoed is my essay on political liberalization after 1989: “Africa: The Rebirth of Political Freedom”, *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1991).