



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

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Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin

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The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission encourages some missionaries from the West to engage in their ministries using local languages and resources.

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**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin dedicated to
Coronavirus outbreak: Majority World / African Contexts**

This special-edition of the AVM Bulletin has been produced urgently to give insights on the tackling of coronavirus (covid-19) in Africa and other parts of the majority world.

See below.

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1. How to Tackle Coronavirus in Slums



“The coronavirus is one challenge among many for those living in the world’s informal settlements. Balancing the response to it with broader healthcare and other development priorities will be essential if their long-term resilience to such threats is to be strengthened rather than dismantled,” suggests Mark Weston in [this](#) article.



2. [Shutting markets and churches was a bad idea even as we fight Covid-19](#) says Julius Abungana, considering strategies being used by African governments to tackle the COVID-19 scourge.

3. [Coronavirus in Africa: Emergency laws v individual rights](#) is the title of a piece by the BBC that discusses ways in which African governments are seeking to force the implementation of ‘draconian’ measures designed to prevent the spread of covid-19. African populations do not easily respond to pleas from their governments not backed by force. Covid-19 has been an excuse for governments to use tactics for which they’d otherwise be condemned to disrupt markets and churches. More pernicious – the widespread global advocacy of strategies being used to counter covid-19 in Europe and N. America is leaving African governments with *little choice* but to do the same, despite often a total lack-of-fit with local context.



4. **Jackson Wu gives us [insights on coronavirus](#) in some blogs,** more intended for a Western audience. Coronavirus, he says, is like missionary training!



5. **Leben in Zeiten der Corona** by Juliane Assmann can be found [here](#). (This piece is in German.)



ALLIANCE FOR VULNERABLE MISSION

3rd April 2020

[\(A stand-alone copy of this code of practice is available here.\)](#)

6. Open Letter to Africa's Theological Educators,

Towards a 'Code of Good Practice'

Coronavirus is accelerating the rate at which Western theological colleges and seminaries are going on-line. Once on line, people can join our courses from anywhere. Already, much theological education in Africa from the West is of questionable contextual relevance. Now is the time to adjust what we are teaching and how.

Few give sufficient thought to ways in which our offers of theological education from the West, the place known for wealth and prosperity, can distort theological understanding in Africa. Cheap (i.e. subsidized), friendly, but foreign controlled, English-language based culturally-obscure alternatives to indigenous theological education, shine too brightly. This can easily result in anyone in Africa doing theological education without cow-towing to the West, appearing second class. It has become extremely difficult to engage in contextualization of theological education in Africa.

We suggest the following 'code-of-good-practice' for Western people wanting to participate in theological education in Africa:

1. Theological education from Westerners in Africa should not be presented in English, French, or Portuguese.¹ This is for many reasons;
 - the categories used in these languages are not familiar to Africa,
 - philosophical and other presuppositions underlying these languages tend to be obscure,
 - these languages function in a secular way that is foundationally 'anti-religious',

¹ We single out these three languages because 1. Their use is rooted in a long Western philosophical history that is unfamiliar to Sub-saharan Africa. 2. Original owners of these languages tend to control and dictate how they are used.

- knowledge of these languages providing openings into lucrative contexts results in their being abused by fortune-seekers and in high levels of temptation to being overcome by 'love of this world',
 - teachers who use these languages, because they do not learn how indigenous discourse functions, cannot develop intimate learning relationships with African Christian communities.
2. We need specific guidelines on use of money. As is usually the case, he who pays the piper calls the tune. This means that the West remains in charge of theological education in Africa (even when African people are given positions of responsibility). This does not encourage indigenous ownership, initiative, or responsibility regarding what the church does or how it does it. Arguably, it results in a very dangerous position for the African church, of never thinking for themselves, because distant foreigners are always the purveyors of correct answers. Theological education by local thinkers using indigenous languages should be given priority. This means not subsidizing what is foreign.
- We hope that readers of this open letter won't rush to the African member of their faculty for a conclusive evaluation of what we are suggesting. Africans in our circles have often been 'bought' into compliance. We believe Westerners need to take intellectual responsibility for their actions.²
 - We do not suggest that the West needs to prohibit African people from using English, French or Portuguese in their theological education if they want to do so. Once not subsidized from the West, Africans will be free to choose languages that

² In making this point, we draw on Kowal, Franklin and Paradies' insights arising from work they have done on racism in Australia (all quotations below are from page 327 of their article). Important issues that are revealed in their article are often wantonly ignored. Their context is one of reaching out to aboriginal people. They point out major problems in anti-racism training often going on in Australia. In its place, they advocate for 'reflexive anti-racism'. (We hope our readers understand that anti-racism is affecting, if not dictating many of the West's approaches to the majority world or to indigenous people. We encourage our readers to explore the ambiguity of anti-racism in more detail.) Anti-racism results in a reluctance "to nominate indigenous people's choices or actions as even a partial cause of their ill-health ... [through] fear of 'victim blaming', an attribute associated with racism." As a result, Westerners "attribute Indigenous disadvantage to structural factors that are seen to constrain and limit choices, rather than to the actions of Indigenous people themselves" which leads to "the exclusion of indigenous agency from any explanations" regarding extant contexts, problems, and so on. In order to avoid this kind of disappearance of context, one must work against the "desire to agree with any Indigenous person present." For purposes of this code of good practice this means that when offering education to Africa, ironically perhaps, we might, if continued attachments to Western languages and outside resources are advocated for, have to avoid being guided by Africans. (Kowal, Emma & Franklin, Hayley & Paradies, Yin,, 2013, 'Reflexive Antiracism: a novel approach to diversity training.' 316-337 in *Ethnicities* 13(3), 2013.)

work best for them. Westerners should themselves set a good example through using languages indigenous to Africa.³

- Many Westerners with an ongoing investment into theological education in Africa have had some field experience, but for various reasons have withdrawn to the West. The reasons are typically family and health reasons – children’s education, needs of one’s spouse, illness in the family, need to give children a good foundation in their own culture etc. *Those who have withdrawn from the front line should not use money to overwhelm or overshadow the efforts of those who remain.* People who have withdrawn from the field should either withdraw from theological education on the continent, or continue to engage using an African language.
- Others provide theological education for Africa in the form of short-visits to Africa. At the very least such people should not promote their own ministry over and above that of others (including locals) through financial subsidy using money raised in the West.

Current restraints have made it impossible for African theology to develop in any written or formal form. (When European languages are used to develop theologies, owners of the language invariably twist the way they are used by Africans for their own purposes, often not understanding that English used in Africa is largely an implicit translation from mother-tongue terms, categories and concepts.) This is a serious omission for a massively populous church.

³ In our view, this process is so problematic, that African languages should always be first choice, but we are NOT suggesting that Westerners dictate what Africans do amongst themselves.

We suggest that it is important, before promoting our on-line courses in Africa or for Africans, to learn how and what to teach, and to do so by having course designers from the West be immersed into African contexts and familiar with African languages.⁴

Signatories



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⁴ It is ironic that, while it is accepted that education that is geographically from the West to Africans be guided by White people, as if that is not 'racist', the perception changes regarding education on the ground in Africa. On the ground in Africa, for a White person to be in charge of education (e.g. the Principal of a theological school in an African country) is frowned upon and avoided if at all possible. It is considered that Africans should be doing this for themselves. This leads to White people running things in the West pushing themselves onto the African scene. This back-door actually results in the worst of both worlds: 1. White people in charge. 2. No contextualization. Hence, if Westerners deem it necessary and helpful to continue playing a major role in theological education in Africa, it is of utmost importance for them to be working through Westerners based in Africa who use local languages (so as to be able to learn from local contexts) and to not draw heavily on foreign funds (in order to avoid the promotion of the prosperity gospel and the silencing of local voices for fear of losing funding). Bypassing such people by offering education direct from the West using European languages is a violation of good sense.

It remains to be seen whether Whites who took the trouble to learn African languages and cultures, would remain keen to mediate education from the West that was designed without regard to such insights. This would imply that their local learning was irrelevant to the education being offered. Representing an outside university would constantly identify them with foreign money; everyone would come to them for money, and everything they did would be prosperity Gospel. (The same of course applies to Africans who might agree to be the means for Westerners to apply their curriculum in Africa.)

7. Covid-19 Instigates Western-Guided Global Wide Utopian Movement

By Jim Harries¹ (was posted as academia.edu session on 25.3.20)

The current mourning period instigated by covid-19, a utopian movement aimed at ending death, is of seismic implications for the future of humanity. The 'secular' dream of eternal life on earth is shattered as old and ailing folks kept alive through use of modern medicine succumb daily.² The horror of death has stamped its footprint prominently in places it was being determinedly ignored.³ Compulsory mourning continues globally, with ever wider spread and ever greater restrictions.⁴

The task is major, to re-educate two or three generations in the West to understanding that science and objectivity, though they may provide us with technology, must be denied for life to make sense.⁵ People born from the 60s and beyond, have been otherwise oriented to date.⁶

Africa cannot help but be swept along with the wave, as the internet has confirmed that Western information becomes a global blanket.⁷ Even the most major efforts to respond to covid-19 in the light of local contextual realities stand little chance given the West's current exhaustive effort at challenging death to stop it by staring it in the face. This has created its own struggles for Africa and other parts of the majority world. Markets are being intentionally disrupted by efforts to isolate people in their homes. Yet their homes have no

¹ <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7274-4680>

² There has been talk in the West of people living for longer and longer, and even forever, on earth as we are without God's intervention. This dream is seriously challenged today.

³ Certainly for someone living in Africa, the West seems determined to ignore death.

⁴ I interpret the insistence that people stay at home and 'do nothing' to be an act of compulsory mourning.

⁵ On the basis of science and objectivity, life is absolutely pointless. Faith in Christ stands in denial of truth as presented by the senses and through secular rationality, to say there is hope! Guiding countries using science could be a disaster.

⁶ They have been encouraged to believe in secularism. This is a lot of the 'ruling generation' in the West today.

⁷ When donors, and the internet, and the news, and everything else is plying a 'Western' solution to the Corona virus, it must be extremely hard for any government to stand against this. Especially when English is used in the country concerned. Especially when they want foreign money. Thus decisions made in the West in particular contexts become must-do to everyone else.

food. The focus of people's hope, churches, have had their doors bolted shut. Trying to isolate people in any time of severe crisis is asking for trouble. People need each other.

Thankfully, God is not without his people, as his Word circulates amongst frantically communicating 'isolated' members of today's connected world. We rejoice in the hope that comes in Christ, who defeated death, for those who believe in him.

It's time for a global wide turn-around.⁸

⁸ The Luo language translation used for *metanoia* in the New Testament (rendered in English as 'repent') is lokruok, which is 'turn-around'.

8. Things not being said on the Coronavirus Crisis.

By Jim Harries¹ (was posted as academia.edu session on 31.3.20)

Some aspects of the current managing and reporting of the global-wide coronavirus crisis are a cause for concern. I highlight a few of them here.

1. Statistics presented to us are almost always only of; (a) number of people infected (then we are told that the actual number is probably much higher ...), and (b) virus-related deaths. This conceals all other 'death' going on, which results, as I suggested in my last session,² in a kind of 'holding-our-breath' in determination as if getting the coronavirus death-toll down achieves eternal life.

New York State has about 20 million residents. To maintain a stable population with a life-expectancy of 80, this means that on average 680^3 people die in New York State every day. Are people dying of corona-virus related deaths extra to this? What is the relation between the two? How has corona affected overall death rate? We are not told. (If corona has increased the death rate, then by how much? If that increase is as a result of people who might have survived a few more months dying earlier than anticipated, does that mean that we can expect the death-rate to fall below average later this year? Presumably, if the infection rate of New York State reaches 100%, then all 680 deaths will be 'Corona-virus related'? Then we could even suggest, that 340 coronavirus related deaths daily indicates that 50% of New Yorkers (or at least those already old or suffering from particular ill-health) are infected. Then there could be 340 virus-related deaths, even if the virus were practically harmless.)

2. Global authorities are telling us that the spread of corona virus cannot be stopped, but perhaps can only be delayed. All efforts are being made to delay it. In popular terms, it is easy to translate those efforts as being to try to stop it. Are we putting too much effort into preventing the unpreventable?

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² <https://www.academia.edu/s/95b581c7fb?source=link>

³ $20,000,000/(80 \times 365)$

If the virus is indeed much more widespread through our populations than we think, this explains the geometric rise in cases where the virus is implicated in deaths. A critical question here is not how many corona-related deaths are happening, but; what overall increase in death-rate has arisen due to the virus (see number 1 above)?

3. Many countries have been quick to ban 'religious gatherings'. No one seems to consider what the consequences of this might be. The assumption seems to be that it will bring no consequences. That fits with secular thinking, but is it true?

We are aware that domestic tensions can be severely aggravated as a result of people being forced to spend much more extensive periods of time than usual in close proximity, without outsiders to vary company or regulate what is going on.⁴ Such circumstances give limited outlets for inter-human tension. Many of us live with many inter-human tensions. These are reduced by reminders of the bigger picture, especially of the suffering that Christ was ready to go through so as to save us from our tendency to doing violence to one another. Without such reminder, alternative courses to relieving tension include physical violence, and witchcraft. Banning of Christian gatherings is likely to result in escalation in witchcraft accusations, followed by shunning, abuse of, and or killing of suspects. This in itself is a very dangerous situation.

The way the pandemic is being explained aggravates risk of the above: The primary cause of infection of a person, is another person. This means on principle that every illness associated with coronavirus theoretically at least, when everyone is supposed to be on lock-down, arises from someone else's misdemeanor. That someone-else, traditionally speaking, could be labelled a witch.⁵

4. Today's media, including its science reporting, quickly becomes global. Especially because of the wide spread of English, this means that the whole world instantly knows what is happening in the West, including how coronavirus is being tackled in the West. This results in an

⁴ E.g. no need for good behavior in case a visitor shows up, if one knows that visitors will not show up.

⁵ I say this on the basis of my understanding of witchcraft in Africa, not in Europe.

extraordinarily powerful hegemonic prescription to 'do likewise'. I am doubting whether any but the strongest non-Western states (e.g. maybe China) can muster the wherewithal to do other-than imitate what the West is doing to prevent virus spread. 'Poor' majority world countries hand can be forced to engaging in practices that may not be at all suitable to their own contexts.

This represents a much wider problem, that on the whole I believe needs long-term careful attention. In this crisis it needs urgent attention. The globalization of English, between the wealthy West and the poor South, dummmifies the South. In the short-term, the wealthy should be very careful before using means to educate their own people that could be harmful to others. A classic case of this; lock-down in one's house may be an admirable strategy in wealthy parts of Europe, but may make little sense in parts of Africa where the day's work is what provides the money for the day's food, where toilets are communal, where trust is so low that a high percentage of the population earns from personal selling of food products, and where people who are seen to selfishly withdraw from family and friends can become victims of witchcraft accusation.

5. My final point, regards the general lack of a 'call for repentance' by political leadership and in the media. Implicit in the reluctance to consider repentance (a need for a turnaround in people's ways of life) is an assumption of human goodness that defies evidence. This crisis is likely to be aggravating immorality. Inter-human violence has already been mentioned. Use of drugs, sexual immorality, theft, dishonesty, greed, incest, lust, pornography, and many other vices are likely to be exponentially on the increase in the midst of our current crisis.

There is in my view an extremely urgent need to re-open places of worship, if need be with allowance for social distancing. Being in a crisis does not put human sinful nature or need for God on hold. People should be strongly encouraged to worship God and receive teachings at least for a couple of hours weekly, if not daily.

9. Covid-19 Response. Report from within rural Africa. 4.4.20.

By Jim Harries¹ (was posted as academia.edu session on 4.4.20)

Surveying available literature on the current covid-19 crisis, I have perceived a lack of in-depth and close understanding of responses to disease in Africa. Having lived in these parts, closely integrated into indigenous community for 32 years, it has seemed wise to contribute as best I can towards filling gaps in knowledge that I am perceiving.

I do not write from a position of officialdom or even employment in any prominent institutions. I am loosely affiliated to the Coptic Orthodox Church Mission, which has a large hospital in Nairobi and others elsewhere on the continent. I write independently of the Coptic authority structures. I am not a medical person. I do have a scientific background going back to my early degrees, then more recently (since 1991) have moved in the direction of the social sciences and theology.

For more information on my background and previous publications see <https://jimharries.academia.edu/research> and for my cv see amongst other information available here: <https://wciu.academia.edu/JimHarries> Originally from the UK, I have resided in Africa since 1988, initially in North-West Province of Zambia, nowadays in Western Kenya. I use two African languages on a daily basis. I have been closely associated with the community around here since 1993.

I consider that the following should be borne in mind by people concerned with designing appropriate Africa-policy regarding the current covid-19 outbreak.²

1. Clear communication between the secular West (and the-secular-oriented global community) and traditional Africa is far from easy or straightforward. Particularly when it comes to scientific and pseudo-scientific concerns such as preventative strategies, uses of medicines, general public health. This arises from what to me has been a very irresponsible approach by the global community to Africa, as outlined in this December 2019 post that seems to be prophetic about what is happening now: <https://www.academia.edu/s/af2e0d87ce>

¹ <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7274-4680>

² I write in English in such a way as to endeavour to communicate with Westerners. I do not claim my English to be transparent to people indigenous to Africa.

Limitations in intercultural communication have resulted in low levels of trust in what the global community is sharing with Africa. Dominant communication simply does not translate into African worldviews. What is received is, shall I say, frequently garbled versions that make little sense and retain minimal relationship to original intention. It is widely held that a major reason for leading Africans to engage closely with the West, is so as to obtain finance.

2. Various authors are questioning the relevance and applicability of approaches to covid-19 advocated by the WHO in other parts of the world. (See Appendix 1 below). One size fits all may not be a good global-wide strategy.

I note work by Garfin et. al.³ that points to ways that the media can inappropriately exaggerate a crisis. It is my view that this is happening at the moment. My quibble is with ways in which 'death statistics' are given that conflate 'regular' mortality with that caused by covid-19 – by apparently attributing death to covid-19 even when many other health concerns are in play. This is to my knowledge the first time a global crisis is being presented in this way, of a gross emphasis on death seeming to be intended to frighten people. It would be more helpful to be told differences in mortality figures arising from covid-19 rather than only deaths linked with (no matter how obscurely) covid-19.⁴ It would also be helpful for people to realise normal levels of fatality, e.g. that 1500 people die daily in the UK in the absence of any medical crisis.

3. I have long considered that interventions into Africa based in Western biomedicine are some of the least effective or most difficult to implement, compared to alternatives. The scientific precision required by appropriate medical interventions is particularly foreign to indigenous ways of thinking.

³ Garfin, D. R., Silver, R. C., & Holman, E. A. (2020, March 23). The Novel Coronavirus (COVID-2019)

Outbreak: Amplification of Public Health Consequences by Media Exposure. *Health Psychology*.

Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hea0000875>

⁴ [Session on academia.edu, corona virus crisis.](#)

As a result of the above, there is a lot to be said for, if the West is not actually IN CONTROL, being very careful to remove control from traditional local actors. The middle road, in which local wisdom has been over-turned yet bio-medical knowledge is not sufficiently applied, can leave one in the worst of both worlds. Prescribing something that may seem obvious to some Westerners, can be far from obvious to communities in Africa. One should expect levels of imprecision in implementation way beyond Western norms.

4. I would question the applicability of social-distancing. Amongst the difficulties we have with this in Africa is ways in which, in my understanding, African ways of life are designed to keep people close to one another and dependent on one another. Such orientation runs at loggerheads with social-distancing and self-isolation strategies. This is so to a major degree, way beyond taboos to such practice in Western countries.

The above can be explained in many ways. Men and women having separate roles adds to immediate issues if they are separated. People are expected to do things in ways that are visible to their neighbours and the wider community, as anything to the contrary can be interpreted as selfishness, and anything done secretly can be interpreted as witchcraft.⁵

This orientation to keeping people close to one another contributes to ways in which people get their daily bread from their daily labour. People do not try to build up a reserve for a 'rainy day'. To do so would be to invite beggars – who often can only be refused with great difficulty. Hence telling people to 'lock-down' makes little sense.

5. African witchcraft is little understood in the West. The power-house of witchcraft is envy.⁶ In many respects, in my view, the English term witchcraft is a poor descriptor of what is going on in Africa today. Terms currently translated into English as witchcraft could be better translated as 'envy'. The latter would more accurately communicate the normality and irrevocability of what is going on – Western people tend to think

⁵ 'Apendaye upweke ni mchawi', could be translated as 'he who likes to be alone is busy killing other people.' No wonder, yet again, that Swahili-speaking people don't want to 'self-isolate'! <http://swahiliproverbs.afrst.illinois.edu/association.html>

⁶ Harries, Jim. 2012. "Witchcraft, Envy, Development, and Christian Mission in Africa." *Missiology: An International Review* 40(2): 129–139.

Africans should discard witchcraft like an unnecessary vestigial organ. I think they would agree – that ‘envy’ is simply a part of being human.

Thus is witchcraft, as it is widely known using English, in Africa.

Fear of envy, or avoidance of envy, motivates a great deal of African people’s behavior. It contributes to why people live outside of their houses if they can, so as not to appear to be harbouring secrets or behaving destructively in secret.⁷

In many communities, witchcraft is considered the default cause of suffering. This has me particularly concerned re. current practice in many parts of the continent where the primary counter to such, the activities of the Christian church, have been curtailed in the interests of aiding social-distancing. It is ironic that this should have happened, yet the rest of African ways of life continue to involve a great deal of inter-personal proximity. Intense witchcraft beliefs result in shunning, ‘isolating’, and in some cases eventually killing of those considered guilty. This certainly runs at loggerheads to bio-medical prescriptions. Countering covid-19 should not be allowed to become a backdoor to the revival of witchcraft.

6. A known difficulty in Africa, is the non-existence of what is ‘invisible’.

This includes covid-19 germs. Whereas the West has a long history of separating two realms, the real and unreal, spiritual and material, and so on, such has not been African practice. This makes it particularly difficult to understand how someone can be sick while healthy.

Some responses to the above would be that ‘education is needed’. I don’t think that is so simple. Westerners’ commonly held comprehension, that their worldview and secularism is somehow universal, normal and transparent, is very misguided. Rather than education to orient African people to understanding how to do things ‘properly’, it might be a higher priority to understand what Africans do and how, and to factor that into disease prevention and cure strategies, leaving them in control using their own understanding as much as possible.⁸

⁷ Although I here describe African levels of envy as if particularly high, historically I think the peculiar ones are Westerners who have somehow managed to control this powerful emotion.

⁸ That is; not the understanding of practitioners of witchcraft, but of those who have found release from witchcraft.

7. Ways in which a large proportion of the population of Western countries, my knowledge is especially of the UK, agree to comply with directives based on bio-medical knowledge, confirm ways in which the West has a strong 'social-conscience'. That is, in much of their life and activities, Western people see themselves as working towards a collective good, based on some kind of rational understanding of how that collective good is to be achieved. The same is largely or entirely absent in parts of Africa. It is taboos and not visions of collective purpose that keep people together. It is therefore much harder to expect African people to simply comply with instructions supposedly for the collective good, that do not make sense to them as individuals and with respect to their communities' norms.⁹

Appendix 1.

<https://www.globaldashboard.org/2020/03/27/how-to-tackle-coronavirus-in-slums/>

Vulnerable Mission and Covid-19 (From *AVM Bulletin 12(4)*, 2020)

- [Serving cross-culturally in the age of COVID-19](#) is the title to a blog recently written by missionary to Tanzania Tamie Davis. She is realizing that Tanzanians don't think 'secularly' as the West thinks they ought, and so can end up in favour of policies to tackle covid-19 that don't make sense to her. As a missionary who wants to listen and understand not dictate ... what to do, if from a Western point of view, people are engaging practices that endanger their own lives? She concludes: "what I'm trying to do is to give the benefit of the doubt to those sharing what seems damaging to me, even a health risk. I'm trying to listen to what they're actually saying, not what I hear. I'm trying to think flexibly,

⁹ Throughout this piece, I am endeavouring to translate African realities into language that I hope gets the closest fit to extant comprehension of people, particularly those more medically oriented that I assume to be a majority, involved in the global-communities dealing with the covid-19 threat.

seeking another explanation, one that might not naturally occur to me but might have resonance in this culture.”

- An article in ‘the conversation’ explains: [Why a one-size-fits-all approach to COVID-19 could have lethal consequences.](#) This article warns us that: “Social distancing may cost lives in Africa. In Africa, millions will starve if the global economy enters a protracted downturn. We must ask whether the number will be more than COVID-19 will kill in a region (such as in South Africa) where only 6.09% of the population is over 65.” (In Kenya, this is 3.07%. UK; 18.5%)

(Illustration is of an empty street in Cairo.)

- [What The Early Church Can Teach Us About The Coronavirus](#)

Those of us who have hope in Christ should be there to encourage and support those who suffer, often at risk to our own lives.

10. Covid-19 Response. Report from within today's Africa. April 6th 2020.¹

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 6.4.20)

"Some leaders are clueless. Tanzania's president, John Magufuli, said churches should stay open because the coronavirus is 'satanic' and 'cannot survive in the body of Christ'." (The Economist, 26th March 2020.)²

Understanding Today's 'Clueless' Leaders.

Magufuli (President of Tanzania) is standing up to the domineering bulldozer that, now using covid-19 as excuse, endeavours to turn Africa into a hospital ward of undisciplined assumed-stupid little children chained to their cots: 'If you don't agree with us in the West who know better, then you must just be an idiot'.

My issue is with deaf and blind-Westerners. Not that Africa has nothing to learn. We should learn from each other. But there are ways ...

Africa having a lower life-expectancy than Europe / America³ should have us ask why all African governments aren't desperate for Westerners to live in their countries? They are not. Tanzania, and many other African countries have stringent visa rules. They want tourist money, but they don't want Westerners coming to settle. *Why?* My suggestion: Westerners are least likely to value and adjust to indigenous ways of life. They consider themselves superior, take converting others to their 'secularism' as their major purpose, to which they dedicate endless hours and much funding.⁴ Should African countries be wanting to always follow Western advice, they would be begging Westerners to govern them. They are not.

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² <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2020/03/26/the-coronavirus-could-devastate-poor-countries>

³ I don't think I need to prove that; I think it goes without saying.

⁴ Fundamentalist Muslims may be even more insistent on domination. Yet in a radically different, and often indigenously more comprehensible way, than do secular Westerners, e.g. they are really after money and wives.

Covid-19 is another means for the West to ramp-up its already ceaseless efforts at convincing everyone else of the superiority of their logic: just what self-respecting African governments are trying to avoid.

‘Education’ has been in Africa for 100 years. There is a lack of fit. Africa remains African. African context has not disappeared. Trying to ignore it will not cut the mustard. That is why education remains a foreigner, and why Africa doesn’t understand the West.

Assuming that what people will understand in the West will be understood in Africa is misguided. Understanding comes through *translation*. Where English is official tongue in Africa, that’s impossible, leaving miscomprehension.⁵ Tanzania is a little different thanks to Swahili. Where are disease-control policies devised using Swahili? (Not translated to Swahili from English!)

If African people were convinced about Western superiority, then they would act as Westerners do *without being paid to do so*. Currently, Africa is paid ... by endless means, to pretend to be Western. Covid-19 brings a ramping up of the same – funding is available for following of ‘global’ recommendations. Without the funding, they wouldn’t be followed. Local people know that African governments fall in line to get foreign money. Should such be taken seriously?⁶

The author of the *Economist* above assumes Africans to be like Americans. Perhaps an indigenous-president is wiser than that? He knows what his people are thinking. He knows what will and won’t make sense to them. He knows that churches hold the fabric of society together.⁷ He realizes; there’s little point in advocating what to people will appear daft.

Yes, I do blame the West for their ignorance. The West including the ‘global community’ taking secularism as global norm, has been folly. People have in the name of ‘not-being-racist’ refused (for decades!) to explore and try to understand their African brother.⁸

⁵ The globalisation of English resulting in one language being used across diverse cultures, prevents what might have been intelligent ways of translating texts to fit people following different ways of life.

⁶ Giving the excuse that ‘Africa is poor’, is missing the point. It is ‘poor’ for a reason; people make decisions in a way that doesn’t result in material prosperity, as known in the West. What will instantly transform such decision making?

⁷ Africa minus church = witchcraft.

⁸ For more on anti-racism, searching this site for the keyword *raci* gives 16 hits:

<https://jimharries.academia.edu/research>

Statistics are befuddling us. When has Europe last publicized death-statistics as it is doing now? '500 people dying in a day' sounds horrible. We need to realise that in the UK on average 1500 people die every day of the year, whether corona or not.⁹ Not everyone around the world is so ignorant of death, or utopian in their denial of it.

God will have the last word. Human values cannot help but be theologically based.¹⁰ Death is inevitable for all of us; it may be postponed, but it cannot be cancelled. There is more than one wisdom on how to 'postpone' it.¹¹

The global community has learned, that social-isolation isn't so simple in Africa.¹² People have to ignore the command to 'stay at home' to find food. Many who don't 'have' to ignore it, may well be ignoring it anyway if it doesn't make sense to them. (So, churches that provide productive organized meetings of people are closed, while endless informal meetings continue.) Efforts at socially-distancing people by force using violence-prone paramilitary-might, strictures on work and travel, and curfews, could all by destroying economies, ensure that anyone who falls sick quickly becomes hungry.

This crisis will reveal that the West's having self-imposed ignorance on Africa (in the name of not being 'racist'), has its hazards. The West not being able to understand strategies followed by African leaders, does not mean that the latter are clueless.

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=%2fpeoplepopulationandcommunity%2fbirthsdeathsandmarriages%2fdeaths%2fdatasets%2fweeklyprovisionalfiguresondeathsregisteredinenglandandwales%2f2020/publishedweek122020.xlsx>

¹⁰ The notion that human life can continue without any reference to anything but a physical world, while a widespread part of the 'Western secular deception', I find ridiculous given the complexity, sensitivity and spirituality of human existence. Diverse theological positions underlie contemporary Western life, including its secularism.

¹¹ Traditional practitioners ('witchdoctors') who claim to be able to postpone death are in Africa taken very seriously.

¹² <https://theconversation.com/why-a-one-size-fits-all-approach-to-covid-19-could-have-lethal-consequences-134252>

11. Children as vectors for Covid-19: Covid-19 Response. Report from within today's Africa. April 6th 2020.¹

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 6.4.20)

My not having seen or heard of other detailed reports on this topic, I must draw largely on personal experience. On the scientific side; I have seen indications that children, who are relatively unlikely to succumb to covid-19, can nevertheless be 'carriers'.

In the West children who are a part of families under lock-down seem to be behaving largely in a way that is compliant to governments' policies. I assume therefore that on the whole they stick with their parents, and follow rules given together.

The above is, to my understanding, far from the case in much of today's Africa.² In the past, probably, African girls were more home-and-kitchen-bound. Today, schooling, and the absence of child-marriage, leaves them more free to wander. The worst culprits are probably boys, who tend to be more free, even less inclined to accept authority of their elders, and more inclined to rove. (Even given the above, the 'domestic sphere' in Africa is wider than in the West, as it includes wandering looking for firewood, frequent trips to the tap / spring / well, daily excursions to markets (or neighbours etc.) to buy food, fresh milk, and you name it.)

Children are in Africa, I think to a much greater extent than in the West, not raised by biological parents, but by uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, grandmas (and grandpas).³ Often children stay with relatives who have money to pay for their school fees. Girls especially can be appreciated for domestic help they offer in the home. (I will use the term 'parents' below to incorporate all the above relatives.) Non-biological parents typically are less 'feared' by children, and less inclined to care about discipline.

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² As always, generalisation is hard to avoid. I draw on diverse experience, and join the dots as best I can.

³ Grandpas in brackets – as it's really grandmas.

Case study 1. Talking about marriage at a church seminar, I recently encouraged African men I was addressing, to make sure they have a sufficiently strong relationship with their wives so as to provide consistent discipline to their children. Almost (?) all admitted they were defeated to do so, as should their wives beat children, they would castigate them saying it wasn't needed, and vice versa.⁴ Hence children in that relatively-rural community wandered around the streets freely, often in small groups or gangs, even up to late at night, I estimate 9 pm or 10 pm.

Case study 2. At a parents' meeting at a secondary school, many parents gave the reason they were very keen to have their children board in the run-up to exams as being because their 'parents' (i.e. aunties, grandmas, guardians, etc. etc.) had lost control of their behaviour.⁵

Case study 3. Under international pressure, African governments have in recent decades made beating of children 'technically' illegal. In practice, to maintain discipline, African schools have had no choice but to make widespread recourse to physical beatings in order to control children. Those following the media about Africa, are apt to see police officers enforcing control (including of recent curfews and so on that follow on from attempts at increasing social-distance in order to control covid-19) by beating non-compliant adults with sticks. If even adults will only respond to physical beatings; how much more children.⁶

I gather that these days many Western children have preferred computer games at home to roving around outside. This is much less the case in Africa. Children 'rove-around', and are not easily stopped. While African children may appear to Westerners to be submissive, that submission has its limits.

The above has largely so-far under-considered implications for social-distancing and 'self-isolating' communities in Africa. Slums, informal urban settlements, towns and villages are often heavily populated by wandering children – especially of course once schools are closed, and if churches are not

⁴ Marriage relationships in Africa tend to be very different from those in the West. I think often they involve much less intimate communication than is typically assumed to occur in Western families. One indication of this is ways in which married men and women are in Africa much more likely to seek predominantly for social company of their own gender rather than that of their spouse.

⁵ I should say this is especially the case in female-headed households, of which there are many.

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52214740>

able to offer alternative healthy pursuits. In many cases I suspect (fear?) that even threat of beatings by parents may not deter such children. The only thing that may deter them would be getting beaten by police or the para-military.⁷

What are the implications of having these children rove-around? Unless keeping social distance is strongly on their agenda, which it is not, I fear disastrous for 'well-made-plans' designed to prevent covid-19 spread.

⁷ I do not state this because I advocate for it, but as a point of information. School teachers who otherwise handle discipline have no authority once schools are closed.

12. Black-People's Peculiar Vulnerability. Covid-19 Response. Report from within today's Africa. April 8th 2020.¹

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 8.4.20)

Recent media reports on the susceptibility of Blacks in America to Covid-19 are horrifying ... e.g. see here: <https://www.propublica.org/article/early-data-shows-african-americans-have-contracted-and-died-of-coronavirus-at-an-alarming-rate> Blacks in America are succumbing to COVID-19 at a far higher rate than are people of White ethnicity.

If that is happening *within America*, then it bodes very badly for us in Africa.

I was vainly hoping that Blacks might be more robust than Whites. Whatever robustness there is clearly does not save even relatively-prosperous African-Americans.

After COVID-19, I believe we will have to recognize the folly that has underlain 'anti-racism': People have lived on eggshells² to not say unsavory things about our Black brothers and sisters – no matter how true those things actually are. Truths thus concealed will contribute to today's looming disaster.

East Africans do not know what 'anti-racism' is.³ What anti-racism brings them comes from beyond their world. Those promoting 'anti-racism' have not been Africans in Africa, but in the West.⁴ Africans in the West have stood to benefit financially: *anti-racism has, by ensuring income equalities within Western*

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² Kowal, Emma & Franklin, Hayley & Paradies, Yin, 2013, 'Reflexive Anti-racism: a novel approach to diversity training.' 316-337 in *Ethnicities* 13(3), 2013, 324.

³ 'Anti-racism' is not the way most indigenous people conceive of their relationship with whites.

⁴ My reference to anti-racism is primarily to the north-American model, which seems to me to have become more globalised than many alternatives.

*countries, enriched many Blacks living within them. It has not brought the same benefits for Blacks living in 'their own' African countries.*⁵

The impact of anti-racism in the West on Africa has been enormous. Often the impact has not been positive. As indicated above, I suspect that many people indigenous to Africa are not aware of how they are affected by this impact.

- Westerners coming to Africa have implicitly set-out to *prove that Africans are not different from Westerners*. While not an overt agenda, this has underscored everything. Westerners have turned intentional blind-eyes to much happening on the African continent. This can hardly be understated. As a result, truth in Africa is always being reported grossly on the 'rosy' side.⁶ (Unless, of course, a report was intended to raise funds in the West. Then the cause for problems has always been explained as other-than the way of life of the people.⁷)
- Very few have dared suggest that Western education may not be the best thing for Africa. Western languages and curricula, like a juggernaut or tidal wave, have crushed over the indigenous destroying resistance to extension of Western hegemony. Western hegemony means that African people expect others to make their decisions.
- Any suggestion that people's poverty is due to their own ways of life has been majorly oppressed if not damned.⁸ It has simply been politically not-expedient to allude to such. So, 'self-destructive' lifestyles have continued unabated.⁹
- The long history of the West's being steeped in the Gospel has made it what it is today. Secular historians having tried to blank out that history has contributed to *development* in the majority world being seen as a technical and financial rather than a 'religious' thing. Formal inputs from the West incorporate endeavors to deny benefits of relationship with

⁵ Unless working for international bodies.

⁶ Where 'rosy' = that African people are 'secular like us (in the West)'.
⁷ Kowal, 'Reflexive,' 327.

⁸ "It is simply politically unacceptable to suggest a cultural root to poverty," (Jindra, Michael, 2014, 'The Dilemma of Equality and Diversity,' *Current Anthropology*, 55(3), June 2014, 316-334, 328.)

⁹ When I say 'self-destructive lifestyles', that assessment of being self-destructive is clearly partial. This is; life-styles based on decision making processes that would by the West be considered counter to human thriving. For example, in which funeral attendance might take priority over nourishing children.

God. Majority world countries have been deceived. Indigenously-powered development has been curtailed.

The above touches on the tip of an iceberg. Anti-racism and political correctness trumping truth in the West, has contributed to a contemporary situation of ill-preparedness for the current crisis on the continent of Africa. To date, with the aid of foreign funding, African governments have endeavored to implement strategies to counter COVID-19 that mimic what is happening in the West.¹⁰ Such strategies wrongly presuppose the absence of real cultural and life-style difference.

For a pre-publication copy of my book *Anti-Racism Exposed: how secularism kills Africa*, send an email to jim@vulnerablemission.org

¹⁰ Given the power of Western media, it has in my view in many ways been almost impossible to do otherwise.

13. Why African people see God as in control: Covid-19 Response. Report from within today's Africa. April 8th 2020.¹

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 8.4.20)

African people's discourse often makes much mention of God. African people seem to expect God to solve their problems. Sometimes that seems fatalistic – instead of acting to solve a problem; they do nothing but rely on him ...

I think the above feature of African life is often striking to Westerners. The latter prefer to solve problems themselves. What underlies this African intuition on God's actions?

Allow me to begin by pointing out that we all, to function as 'normal' humans, need to *all the time* live in denial of 'scientific' understandings of life.

Scientifically, life is meaningless, pointless, painful, and incomprehensible. This is not to say that science cannot be helpful. But to suggest that science cannot 'rule'; it's role must be as an 'aid'. It does not provide morality, or purpose, or fulfillment.² Guidance for the achieving of a satisfying life must come from elsewhere.

Now back to Africa ...

Perhaps in history there was a time when people were more rational than they have been recently. Perhaps, for a while, that worked. Then, after a while, people being people, it no longer worked. That is, some people began to be selfish, greedy, unkind, then upset, frustrated, sad and angry. I think the latter is particularly critical. Some angry people find others responsible for their ills. They want to take revenge. That revenge might take the form of fighting with,

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² Scientific work and research can be fulfilling, if it is, or potentially is, appreciated by other people.

beating, bludgeoning or otherwise attacking a perceived enemy. Once that has happened, revenge can breed revenge, and result in endless cycles of aggression – known as feuds.

As all that was going on, someone came up with a great idea. This idea we sometimes call ‘magic’. If this is a deception – it is a very useful one! The angry man carrying a big stick setting out to bludgeon his enemy to death, was told that for a small payment he could kill his opponent by another means. Using that other means, magic, left no clear link to identifying the killer! The witchdoctor had many options. He could bury something near a path followed by the ‘enemy’. He could curse him. He could tell him someone wanted to kill him. He could backbite him. He could do lots of hocus pocus!

All three people were helped: the victim didn’t get bludgeoned, the potential murderer remained incognito, and the ‘witchdoctor’ got paid for his service! (In practice, sometimes perceived enemies did get killed, they were called witches. Sometimes witchdoctors were accused of being witches. That seemed to be a small price to pay for the whole system to operate.)

Above is my simplified portrayal of what has been the African system of coping with life. We could say, that it brought enormous benefits – it stopped a lot of fighting and killing. To continue the system, simply required that everyone believe that ‘magic’ works.

A major problem with the above system, is the distrust and deception that it engenders. Using magic to solve your problems puts you into a world where you never really know who, if anyone, you can trust, or who is telling the truth. Melland in commenting on traditional African community in Zambia wrote: “thou shalt not speak the truth is practically a commandment.”³ This system can produce a lot of poverty (many conflicts arise from envy, and a way of reducing envy is not having things or doing things for others to be envious of).⁴

Many Western people might not perceive the system as being all so wonderful!

African people realized that when the missionaries came to Africa. They were amazed by the levels of thriving they found amongst missionary communities.

³ Melland, F.H., 1923, *In Witch Bound Africa: an account of the primitive Kaonde tribe and their beliefs*. Philadelphia: J.B.Lippincott Company, 129.

⁴ Infant mortality could be between 60 and 90%. (Melland, *In Witchbound*, 52.)

They in due course realized that was because of missionaries' belief, not in 'magic', but in God. This had African people be very interested.

Since then, African people have become devoted to the Bible. They are very actively following God's law and trusting in his grace. This is proving wonderful for them. Following the God of the Bible, believing in Jesus, has massively transformed people's lives. It has brought forgiveness, and even love.⁵ Many African people believe in God and in Jesus. They do not want to go back to blaming each other for wrong things, deceiving each other with magic, or hunting (and sometimes killing) witches.⁶

Actually, it seems Western people, even those who claim to be atheists ... actually believe in God as well. (Their way of life has the same foundation.) They express themselves differently.⁷

⁵ The term 'love' can be understood in many different ways. I here refer to love as outlined in the New Testament.

⁶ Residues of these practices tend to remain in African communities.

⁷ I have articulated this case in more detail in this book: Harries, Jim, 2017, *The Godless Delusion: Europe and Africa*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock. (In outline form, on page xxii.)

14.Covid-19 What is Happening in Africa? – a personal testimony, 9th April 2020¹

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 9.4.20)

“Have you ever had malaria?” I am asked at times when visiting the UK. “More times than I can remember,” is my response to my questioner. Living in indigenous African community, malaria, amoeba, giardia, bed bugs, and you name it – things that sound exotic and frightening in the UK, are the daily hazard. Mosquitoes regularly buzz around my head, each one potentially carrying a lethal dose of a disease ...

Serving God amongst people requires being committed to them. (OK – yes, there can also be a role for short-termers, providing they don’t expect to be taken too seriously.) Personally, my ‘acutest’ level of commitment is and has been to 12 children who live in my home, myself as adoptive-father.²

Intentionally, my home is neither in a town, in a ‘safe’ area, or in a better-off location. I live in a house which I rent cheaply because it is far from the road, where other (African) people don’t want to live.

My connection to people in the community is such, that I live as-they-live; same food, same source of water, same mosquitoes, same language, same standards of hygiene, same fuel for cooking, same ‘ragged’ clothes for children,

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² I have had an average of 12 children staying in my house since 1997. Obviously they change; the oldest now was not even born when I started taking in children. Almost all children are full orphans; no known living parents. Throughout those years I have worked together with the same house-mother, a lady who was widowed in 1994.

same church to attend, same openness to neighbors dropping in, same system for washing clothes, same routine for cleaning dishes, ... same vulnerability.³

Few predicted today's crisis; being in a situation where physical proximity with a poor community could be as hazardous as we are now being told is the case! African governments are using force to appear to be following advice constantly drummed into their ears by the global community: social-distancing and self-isolation.⁴ The reason they are using force, is because if they did not use force, then their people wouldn't do what they were told. It should be obvious, that African people aren't science-guided in the way that are Westerners. Major guidance comes from elsewhere, e.g. 'ancestors.'

If even adults respond to governments only under threat of beatings, what about children? Having reared African children for well over 20 years⁵ I have got to understand them quite well. They can be very cooperative and compliant, provided they are told to do things which they understand and that are in line with their people's tradition. Tell them anything contrary to the above, and they'll easily say 'yes' to your face, but 'no' in their actions! So, right now, there is only one way in which I could stop my children running around all over, ignoring social-distancing, and playing with every other child in the village who may be carrying covid-19. That is – to start beating them (i.e. caning them) regularly, painfully, and hard.

My above living context leaves me to make a decision that none of my Western friends or supporters in this work, has to make. That is, either to instantly and fearfully 'drop' 23 years of investment into children's lives, scattering souls I have nurtured for decades to the wind, damaging 32 years of witness and ministry. Or, to daily expose myself to high-risk levels of infection to covid-19; exactly what all the wisdom from the West is saying one should not do, by continuing to live shoulder to shoulder with a bunch of African kids. (Alternatively, I could look for a house to rent by myself, cook and clean for myself alone, and just send money home once per week ... Sounds crazy to me in the light of all those years of unfettered commitment.)

Why am I writing this? Partly, simply to explain a context in Africa that the West doesn't seem to be getting. Partly, to justify why I am, in terms of

³ Yes, I do have health insurance, and back-up financial resources in case of ill-health, on which I have never yet drawn.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52214740>

⁵ In fact, for over 30 years, as I first had African children stay in my home in 1988.

contemporary wisdom in the West, on a course of suicidal folly. Partly, to try to 'knock sense into' my colleagues in Europe and America who are being fed massive delicious daily helpings of self-justification from the media for 'distancing' policies adopted by governments apparently led by science.⁶ I take Western policy at the moment to be irresponsible on a number of scores:

1. It's forcing everyone else's hand and so condemning Africa to chaos,⁷ while based on gross utopian misreading of truth.

Perhaps folks in the West do not realize that they have the 'one-time-colonies' standing on their coat-tails? If so, then it is time they woke up to their Christian responsibility to care for those dependent on them. My predicament is not so different to that of African people, now left with the choice; either be grossly selfish and look after 'me-only' by following advice coming from the West, or ignore 'science' for the sake of your people (while pretending you are doing what you are told so as not to stop the flow of donor funds).

2. Propaganda is being substituted for truth
I take the below from [here](#) today (9th April 2020).⁸

"New Jersey also had a record number of deaths in the past day: Gov. Philip D. Murphy said that 275 people had died there, up from 232 on Tuesday. More people have died in New York and New Jersey — a total of 7,772 — than in the rest of the United States combined. Mr. Cuomo said that the staggering death toll could continue to rise even as hospitalization rates were falling, because it reflected people who had been on ventilators for long periods of time."

Why do I say that propaganda is being substituted for truth? The strong implication is that all the deaths are caused by covid-19, that there are no deaths happening other than those cause by covid-19, and that covid-19 will be eradicated. In actual fact, most people 'killed by' covid-19 are already very sick, people dye every day in their thousands, and no one can be certain that covid-19 will be eradicated.⁹ (New York states has 20,000,000 residents. If the

⁶ Some of this advocacy I consider grossly scaremongering and immoral, for example see: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52157824>

⁷ Africa has no choice, I suggest, but to follow prescriptions for dealing with covid-19 that come from the West.

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/us/coronavirus-live-updates.html#link-67cb7f06>

⁹ Although technically people are currently self-isolating so as to flatten the curve to reduce the pressure on health services, I suggest that dominant PR implies that we are stopping its spread rather than slowing its spread.

average life expectancy is 80 years, that would mean on average 700 people die every day. In New Jersey, 308 people die every day, in the absence of any pandemic. Even were covid-19 harmless, should 50% of New Yorkers have the virus, then 350 people with the virus would die every day. Why are these simple mathematical truths consistently ignored?)

3. It reflects decades of biased self-blinded scholarship.

Intentionally not taking account of what people in poor parts of the world are doing is not a new thing for the West: “Ignoring the connection between culture and poverty is tantamount to self-censorship and indicates a basic failure of scholarship.”¹⁰

4. It is grossly partial and ignoring the predicament of the rest of the world.

I think this point is so obvious, as to need no further emphasis: the West is presupposing the universality of understanding enshrined by its particular comprehension of secularism.

10 Jindra, Michael, 2014, ‘The Dilemma of Equality and Diversity,’ *Current Anthropology*, 55(3), June 2014, 316-334, 316.

15. Covid-19 in Africa: an important Swahili proverb: *drop your traditions, be a slave.*

By Jim Harries (was posted as academia.edu session on 11.4.20)

One of the most quoted Swahili proverbs I frequently come across tells us: *mkosa (mwacha) mila ni mtumwa*.¹ It could be translated ‘drop your traditions, be a slave,’ or ‘he who is without an ancestral tradition to follow is no better than a slave’.

Having been reminded of this proverb again and again over many years of engaging with Swahili-speaking people, I take it that it could be pivotal in people’s lives. It encourages someone never to leave their traditions behind, no matter what. The alternative is slavery. Who wants slavery? How then is this proverb interpreted and applied to life?²

That today’s African people live between two powers is well known.³ The global-community, guided by the West, wants them to secularise and modernize. Their own ancient tradition prescribes an alternative very un-secular and un-modern way of life. The proverb *mkosa mila ni mtumwa* adds to African people’s conviction that; no matter how much pressure they are put under, they must never part with their ancestral ways. That is: *in order to avoid being slaves, they must always interpret advice they get from the West, in the light of their own traditional understanding.*

One wonders what that makes of today’s advice on social distancing to avoid contracting the covid-19 virus? African people are being advised to radically change their ways of doing things on the basis of something so small that it is

¹ Here’s a video explaining what this means: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8DE-Q5KaLc> (The video is not in English. I guess if it were it wouldn’t make sense.)

² A very recent BBC documentary film seems to be relevant to our concern here. “Most of the awful acts in history ... are the result of acts of obedience, not disobedience,” the BBC tells us (<https://www.bbc.com/reel/video/p086tI5n/the-surprisingly-dark-world-of-having-free-will>). Already the media has reported brutality by African police trying to force people to practice social-distancing. The excuse easily given for this by authorities in Africa, is that they are only trying to implement what they have been told to do. That is; the free will to make decisions is out of their hands. Hence they will not consider themselves responsible for ‘mishaps’ that arise.

³ “In 1958, Achebe published his first novel: *Things Fall Apart*. The groundbreaking novel centers on the clash between native African culture and the influence of white Christian missionaries and the colonial government in Nigeria. An unflinching look at the discord, the book was a startling success and became required reading in many schools across the world,” (<https://www.biography.com/writer/chinua-achebe>)

invisible that, at the time the advice is given, has had no discernable impact on anyone in their community. They are told that they can be 'sick' for two or more weeks, without realizing that they are 'sick'. They are told to stay 'at home' all day with all their family. Not to go to work (unless essential), not to buy food (if possible have it delivered), thus not to earn money to buy the day's food, not to get any water from the spring, not to collect firewood, not even to defaecate or urinate! (All these things are done outside of one's house, sometimes a considerable distance away, usually shared by other households.) Just stay in the house! Should they meet with their neighbors, then they should stay 2 metres away from them. Then they are told that one person in a far-away city in their country, an old man over 66 who had diabetes, high blood pressure, and who-knows-what, has succumbed to this fatal ailment.⁴ Well – don't old people die every day?⁵

If there was ever a time when *mkosa mila ni mtumwa* is true, this seems to be it! To take that advice seriously would make you the laughing stock – if it were even possible!: You need food to eat, for which you have to work that day. You can't live without water. Plus, you have young children in the house who like to play. All your relatives' and neighbours' children are playing outside. They are clearly not coming to any harm. Are you going to prevent your child from joining them? If you are going to try, you'd better be ready to be very unpopular! You will need to punish them severely for contravening the new rules, and don't expect your wife or husband to stand with you on this ...! And so on.

So, my reader may suggest, 'what is here unusual about Africa? Surely every people around the world will process things that they hear in the light of their own understanding?' That may be the case. Yet there are differences. When White Americans 'process' what they hear from the UK, their processing through their own understanding is not so different from the way native-British people process. Yet, is that how African people will process?

On the surface, Africa seems to 'think' as does the West. African people have been drawn away from engaging with their traditions, into ignoring them. Instead of building their lives on 'who they are', African people have been told

⁴ <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001365816/kenya-reports-first-coronavirus-death>

⁵ Death is much more of a daily experience for many African people than it is in the West. In Europe and America, it tends to be hidden; many people who die are those who are already very old and 'out of circulation'. Relatively speaking, funerals are unimportant affairs.

that ‘who they are is wrong’, so must not be mentioned. No matter what their traditions, they must live as if they are Europeans. Those who agree to live this ‘lie’ often receive massive financial rewards. Those who refuse to do so, given the modern world as it has been, have been discarded, silenced, ignored. In theory, then, when African people hear something from the West, they process it as would people in the West.

Western history is written in respectable books that line the shelves of important libraries. Is it correct to assume though that African history, being unwritten, does not exist or has no impact on people’s lives? That is the theory. In theory, African tradition is blanked out, and African people appropriate European tradition. As a result, for African people to be guided by their tradition, is to be guided by something that has not been studied, not exposed to contemporary times, not written, not recognized, not open to transformation.⁶ Something, as far as the West is concerned, in a time-warp.

Many African people have engaged their traditions – informally, orally, unofficially. Many have done so through their expression of the Christian faith. God’s word has spoken to their traditions in a singular way, providing healing balm, transforming instead of despising their indigenous beliefs. Western scholars have been very slow to pick up on this, often seeking to criticize rather than praise African people for their efforts at lifting themselves up using the Gospel.⁷ Many Westerners understand the African preference for the Christian faith over true ‘secularism’ as being an error.

⁶ This important point hardly seems to be recognised: a population of people ‘should’ be free to think for themselves. In these days of globalised communication, such thinking could be expressed, following conferring and discussion, in written form. The development of a body of literature would result in the building up of a kind of consensus on ‘what is true’ for those people. Outsiders to the population in question could learn about the people concerned through accessing that body of literature. Instead, today, as a result of African people economically-speaking having been forced to write using European languages, meaning that their pursuits are always under the supervision of non-Africans, no such body of knowledge is allowed to develop. Instead, African traditions continue to be expressed only orally, to be hardly understood by non-Africans at all, and technically (to avoid racism) to not-exist.

⁷ Paul Gifford, great scholar of African Christianity over many decades, Emeritus Professor of the University of London, confesses: “my view is that Africa’s only hope of joining the modern world is to ... enforce the rule of law, build institutions, and adopt rational bureaucratic structures, systems, and procedures in education, health, agriculture, transport and so on,” (Gifford, Paul, 2015, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*. London: Hurst and Company, 11). Gifford, whose research was carried out entirely using English,

The massive spanner in the works preventing African self-understanding used by the West has been anti-racism. Anti-racist legislation implemented in many Western countries has made paying formal attention to differences in culture of non-Western people as against western people illegal. Even reference to any aspects of their behavior that run contrary to secularism, is prohibited.⁸ Hence peculiarly African problems have been rendered invisible. It was hoped that as a result they would disappear. Western people themselves, who in recent centuries have shifted more and more towards secularism from overt faith in God, have found themselves with no means to understand Africans' 'strange traditions' other than incredulity as to how someone could be so stupid ... an incredulity that they have chosen to conceal by ignoring it through fear that should they draw attention to it, they risk being accused of being racist.

The above has been reflected linguistically. Pre-world war two, let's say before the modern era, many scholars and authorities in the West realized that the best way to help a people was to encourage them to understand themselves using their own languages.⁹ It was only subsequent to world war 2, that this wisdom was thrown to the wind.¹⁰ African and other people found economic balance sheets to be such, that education and formal functions of their communities had to be in European languages. We can certainly say with Bobbi Sykes; "What? Post colonialism? Have they left?"¹¹ Foreign languages, that could make little sense of indigenous traditions, resulted in a constant lie, a

seems to see little value for Christianity except in so far as it might be a means to modernisation. Ben Jones, from the University of East Anglia, recognises that "people [i.e. presumably Western scholars, not African people themselves] have side-lined churches from the study of local-level politics," (Jones, Ben, 2005, 'The church in the village, the village in the church, Pentecostalism in Teso, Uganda.' 497-517 in: *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, XLV(2), 2005, 513.)

⁸ The prominence given to secular thinking in the West is such, I suggest, as to have resulted in many cultural aspects of African ways of life having been assumed to be of genetic origin. This unhelpful conclusion has resulted, in an age in which positing a genetic basis for differences in people's behaviour and aptitudes is roundly condemned, in an ignoring of culture.

⁹ "The aim of education in Tropical Africa should be to preserve and develop a vernacular as a medium of expression and of communication in adult life and as the vehicle of native thought and culture. Therefore the mother tongue should be the basis and medium of all elementary education in Tropical Africa," (cited by: Brutt-Griffler, Janina, 1998, 'The Development of English as an International Language: a theory of world language.' PhD Dissertation. Ohio State University, 117.)

¹⁰ Brutt-Griffler, 'The Development, chapter 3 (63-87).

¹¹ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai, 1999, *Decolonising Methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books Limited, 24.

pretense to be what the languages portrayed. This has resulted in millions of people around the world realizing that whatever they think for themselves, is error.¹²

When COVID-19 came along, the only thing that could pull people back from perceived 'slavery', was drawing on unreflected-upon ancient traditions.¹³ Except, that is, those who have taken the Gospel to heart, who are ready to understand what they are being told as Christians, based on the Bible, that is transforming their traditions. Either way; re-interpretation of directives arising from the intent not to be *enslaved*, may be cancelling their intended scientific efficacy. Less directing may be better.

To live closely to a people requires appropriating something of their beliefs and practices. Arguably, even a foreigner, who makes an effort to do such, might prove to be a way of assisting people to deal with their identities and contexts. Yet, the powerful prevailing logic from the West has in recent decades been so hegemonic as to hardly leave a space for practice of the latter; which we call 'vulnerable mission'.

¹² "African innovations/deviations have for a long time been viewed as errors, especially by educators," Muthwii tells us. (Muthwii, Margaret Jepkirui, 2007, 'Language Planning and Literacy in Kenya: living with unresolved paradoxes,' 46-62 in: Liddicoat, Anthony J., (ed), 2007, *Language Planning and Policy: issues in language planning and literacy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 53.)

¹³ Here's a video explaining what this means: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8DE-Q5KaLc> (The video, already cited above, is not in English. I guess if it were it wouldn't make sense.)