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**Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin**

**May 2020** (Archived back-copies [here](#) Subscribe for free [here](#))

**Volume 12, Number 5.**

Editor: Jim Harries, PhD, Chairman of the AVM



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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.**

.....

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

This May 2020 edition of the AVM Bulletin is largely dedicated to issues concerning the current global coronavirus crisis, especially as it pertains to the majority world.

**See below.**

## Contents

	Page
Keeping Hope Alive in the Time of Covid-19. By Stan Chu Ilo	3
BBC Reports on Coronavirus in Africa	3
Reflection: My Dilemma in East Africa Related to Covid-19	3
Personal reflections by Jim Harries on life in Africa during the pandemic.	
Dying of hunger or falling ill: Africa's dilemma facing the coronavirus Some thoughts presented in the Kenya media.	3
India coronavirus: The 'mystery' of low Covid-19 death rates why are covid-19 death rates so low in India?	3
Non-Covid Virus Content	
Orthoproxy: Ethical Storytelling in Cross-cultural Engagement - by M. Andrew Gale	4
WEA launching free online journal by Bruce Barron	4
Reflection: Covid-19: an analysis from an East African Perspective.	5
 BELOW ARE NOT PEER-REVIEWED SHORT-ARTICLES BY JIM HARRIES	
Covid-19. Three Old Men Sat on a Bench discussing the insistence that greedy ghosts be fed bounteous portions of fresh beef	6
Why Scientists shouldn't be leading the way out of the Coronavirus crisis: 10 reasons from Africa.	10
Covid-19 and revenge on the dead / dependence on the dead in Africa today.	16
The Covid-19 pandemic with respect to Africa, in historical-economic perspective	22
A Snapshot of Life in Africa in Covid-19 Times	27



- A short article by Stan Chu Ilo: [Keeping Hope Alive in the Time of Covid-19](#).

"Finally, as President Sirleaf notes in her letter, the only solution to fighting Covid-19 remains in our communities. African communities of faith are potential sites for interrupting the trajectory of Covid-19 in the continent. Religious groups by their very nature offer what Kenneth Pargament and Jeremy Cummings call 'relational resilience.' This gives people a sense of hope through social solidarity. Connectivity through shared bonds of

faith when properly managed can also strengthen the capacity of people to work together, to persevere through adversity in order to bring about a better outcome in the face of outbreaks and traumas. African communities must call forth the social capital which faith can potentially offer as an essential resource in the fight against Covid-19."

- The BBC realised on 15<sup>th</sup> April that 'lock-down' may not be the answer to coronavirus in Africa: [Coronavirus: Why lockdowns may not be the answer in Africa](#) They certainly seem to have been correct [in Kenya where the situation described here is similar to the area where I am living](#). (The picture illustrates our motorcycle taxi operators taking little notice of any need for social-distancing.)



- [Reflection: My Dilemma in East Africa Related to Covid-19](#) Personal reflections by Jim Harries on life in Africa during the pandemic.
- [Dying of hunger or falling ill: Africa's dilemma facing the coronavirus](#) Some thoughts presented in the Kenya media.
- [India coronavirus: The 'mystery' of low Covid-19 death rates](#) why are covid-19 death rates so low in India?

**Non Coronavirus contributions here**

- [Orthoproxy: Ethical Storytelling in Cross-cultural Engagement](#) - by M. Andrew Gale, executive director, global strategy, Church of God Ministries, Anderson, USA.



Apart from Andrew being a friend of mine (and he attended a vulnerable mission event in 2009), what I love about this article, is its effort at being sensitive to how we tell stories about others in the majority world. It is all too easy to tell a story with a happy ending, when the actual 'ending' is still unravelling ... or to tell it in such a way that you (the missionary) are the core heroic figure ... Abstract: "Emerging generations are growing up in a world surrounded by political correctness, where how one speaks about a person, situation,

or issue matters. This is especially true for millennials raised in the United States. Missions has utilized story throughout its history as a way to encourage both financial and physical support of global work. But how one tells the story matters - and it matters even more to millennials. Using Carmen Nanko-Fernández's concept of orthoproxy (speaking rightly on behalf of another), I explore the challenges and opportunities of storytelling and how one might engage in ethical storytelling that is captivating to the reader, while maintaining the dignity of all involved."

**WEA launching free online journal**

*The World Evangelical Alliance's Evangelical Review of Theology is becoming a free online journal, starting with its August 2020 issue. WEA leaders and other prominent Christians will address issues of contemporary concern to the global body of Christ, in a style suitable for general readers.*

*To become a subscriber, send an e-mail to ERT editor Bruce Barron at [bruce.barron0@gmail.com](mailto:bruce.barron0@gmail.com) with "ERT subscription" in the subject line, including your name, e-mail address, country, and (optional) institution. You won't get any ads or unwanted communications, just a thought-provoking journal at least 4 times a year. Article submissions and ideas are also welcome.*

*(The ERT has published many articles related to vulnerable mission. Please consider being a subscriber, telling your friends about this, and writing articles for them! Jim)*

## Reflection: COVID-19: Analysis from an East African Perspective

- See this article by Jim Harries [here](#).

"In terms of it being yet another example of the West telling Africa what to do, little that is happening with the COVID-19 crisis is original. Africa, in practice, has had to discount a lot of "good-sense" coming from the West. The sharpness of today's COVID-19 concern is heightened by its life and death nature, and its sheer magnitude. But the way it is unfolding in Africa I should say is typical: serious advice sincerely given, that neither makes sense nor "works" in the African context. ..."

## Covid-19. Three Old Men Sat on a Bench discussing the insistence that greedy ghosts be fed bounteous portions of fresh beef

By Jim Harries. Posted as session on academia.edu on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

- This article interacts with a BBC news-post entitled ‘Coronavirus: Why lockdowns may not be the answer in Africa’, which is taken as being a partial-repentance by the BBC.<sup>1</sup> The paper looks at fear of ghosts with respect to the coronavirus crisis.

Three of us sat on a bench, in Kenya. We were less than one metre apart – social distancing isn’t taken as seriously in Africa as it is in Europe.<sup>2</sup> I had gone to talk to a friend, who runs a small business, about a fault in the wheelbarrow I had recently purchased from him. My friend, as also the other ‘old man’ on our bench, were both Kenyan. Both, as myself, were over 50 years in age. Our conversation turned to the recent coronavirus crisis.

“The government is insisting that people be buried within 48 hours of death,” said the old man. He then recounted what had recently occurred: “As they were preparing for the funeral of the father of my friend Ondieki (false name), the chief came along, and insisted that Ondieki’s father be buried right there and then, on the same afternoon!”

Some background will help elaborate the picture here. Funerals are vitally important events in this community. People are buried at their rural homes. It has, recently, been imperative that someone, particularly an old man, not be buried without elaborate provision. That included the need to arrange for all family, if at all possible, to be present. Professional catering services had to be laid on. An animal, preferably a large bull, should be slaughtered at the site. Tents needed to be erected. Chairs were hired to seat the mourners, and so on. The above requirements resulted in burials being delayed for days, and often weeks, in order to allow plans to come together.

The old man carried on: “No amount of appealing to the chief would change his mind. So, there and then, Ondieki’s father was buried. Ondieki was not at all happy. I spoke to him on the phone yesterday. ‘As soon as this crisis is over, I will make sure that we slaughter a bull for dad,’ he told me. His dad had

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<sup>1</sup> This news item is dated 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52268320>

<sup>2</sup> As the BBC eventually discovered: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52268320>

spoken to Ondieki in a dream. He had told him that, unless an animal is slaughtered at a ceremony for him, he would make sure that the whole family not-prosper.” “They’ll arrange a ceremony for Ondieki’s dad once this crisis is over?” my friend asked the old man. “That’s right,” he said, “and according to Ondieki, it will be a large and elaborate one.”

“To say that the people believe the dead can speak to them is an understatement,” I thought to myself. My mind went back to numerous other occasions on which I had been told about things that people had heard from dead relatives. The fact that I was told these things was striking to me at the time, knowing that these days people prefer not to say what might result in their not appearing ‘modern’. “It is not that people ‘believe’ that the dead can speak to them,” I reflected, “it is simply that; the dead do speak to them, especially in dreams.”

The old man paused as he considered the scenario that he was describing. This was no new issue! Many, if not most, local people acknowledged that the holding of massive funerals was a major factor causing the undermining of the development of that community. “What is really alarming,” the old man went on, “is that it is not old people insisting that, on account of what the dead are telling them, we should have elaborate funerals. It is young people!” What he was suggesting to us was clear. Our community was in the grip of a ‘satanic fear’. You could call it ‘fear of ghosts.’ Or just plain ‘terror of the dead’. The dead’s insistence on good treatment was draining the young generation of their energy and their resources. “No wonder we need foreign aid to run education, projects, and many other socially-beneficial activities,” I thought to myself, “if the dead are draining all not-designated resources!”

Government restrictions, imposed in order to counter the coronavirus threat, were having what could be said is a ‘beneficial’ impact! A lot of resources were being saved. Those resources could be redirected – perhaps to looking after people who are sick with covid-19? Perhaps towards the education of children, to the purchase of a better-quality diet, to care of orphans and so on. (I have not mentioned all the funeral costs above: travel for numerous relatives, people being absent from their work or business,<sup>3</sup> an expensive coffin, men’s suits, tea shirts, and ladies dresses made for the occasion, video recording of the event, production of glossy pamphlets telling the story of the life of the deceased, fees for the priests who would conduct the burial, building and/or

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<sup>3</sup> Thus incurring opportunity costs.

renovation of houses at the funeral site to impress visitors, and so on.) On the other hand – all that was going to be of no avail if, as soon as restrictions are lifted, endless expensive ceremonies are arranged in memory of those dead who passed on during the coronavirus crisis.

“What is most important (in tackling the coronavirus crisis) is not a list of good ideas, but proper discussion with traders, customers, market authorities, chiefs and local government. They are the ones who will know what will work for them, and how it can be monitored and enforced,” suggests that BBC.<sup>4</sup> This seems like progress! What this confession by the BBC seems to ignore, however, is that in Africa people agree with those in power. ‘Discussion’ is not enough. Before entering into discussion; ‘clever’ people from the West should be not-identified with donors.<sup>5</sup>

African communities are ideological battlegrounds!<sup>6</sup> Wars are being fought. Life and death are often at stake. Even with constant massive injections of foreign aid into African communities, poverty often abounds. Widows, orphans, the old, mentally retarded people, the sick, all these and more are (by Western standards) neglected if not ‘abused’. The dead rule.

Who is battling against the powerful dead? Primarily the Church. It is God verses the dead. The Bible makes scant reference to burial ceremonies. It certainly does not insist on elaborate funerals. It talks of hope in eternal life, not in the slaughter of cattle. Church-building appeals compete with funerals for funds. Churches manage, and help to manage, schools, hospitals, fellowships, holiday clubs for children, visits to old people and widows, and you name it. At the same time, we should not deny – the same battles go on *in the churches: the pressure for churches to orient themselves to care of the dead is enormous*. Sadly, training and orientation for churches, that often comes from the West, ignores rather than addresses these vital issues.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52268320>

<sup>5</sup> The Alliance for Vulnerable Mission, advocates that some Westerners intervening in Africa should not do so on the back of either foreign languages or resources. ([vulnerablemission.org](http://vulnerablemission.org))

<sup>6</sup> Some would say the battle grounds are metaphysical, or religious. Yet, I find both of those terms misleading. They are ‘ideological’, as they are to do with people’s ideas; what people are thinking.

<sup>7</sup> Hence our recently produced code of practice for theological education in Africa: Harries, Jim and Lewis, Fred and Macdonald, John, 2020, ‘Open Letter to Africa’s Theological

I do wonder what impact today's putting life on hold for the sake of countering coronavirus will have? This strategy, of tackling a disease most likely to harm the old by preventing the young from functioning (lock-down and social distancing measures), is hardly indigenous. If the old man above is right, it will not stop fear of the dead. Muzzling the Church in the midst of this crisis, I fear will be allowing those who prefer to obey the dead a head-start they had not anticipated. Coronavirus, just because it is a scientifically-visible issue that is affecting even the West, has acquired status of 'global disaster'. Our arguably much more damaging everyday 'disaster', fear of the dead, is ignored.

The global coronavirus crisis is already teaching Western media that all is not what it seems in Africa.<sup>8</sup> After years of being as 'politically correct' as possible, we are finding that a vast majority of Africans who live in slums and villages, cannot and will not respond to the anti-viral message as is the West. Initially insisting that they do so has already, I suggest, created enormous damage.<sup>9</sup> Poverty-levels have lurched up as a result of sensitive economies<sup>10</sup> coming under attack.<sup>11</sup> As I write, the covid-19 disaster is still playing out. We do not know where it will end, in Africa or elsewhere. Perhaps though, at the very least, it ought to result in more empathy with, and less blocking of, information on circumstances people live with outside of the West than has been happening. Otherwise, global-wide one-size-fits-all medicine might be more damaging than the disease.<sup>12</sup>

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Educators, Towards a 'Code of Good Practice,' *Alliance for Vulnerable Mission Bulletin*, 12(4b), 5-8.

<sup>8</sup> The BBC repents, on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52268320> (as already cited above)

<sup>9</sup> The dominant message from the West seemed to be that Africa needs to act fast, implying that African countries should imitate what the West has done.

<sup>10</sup> To say that African countries have 'economies' is a bit of a misnomer. The term 'economy' implies a level of modern sophistication that is off the radar screen in much of Africa.

<sup>11</sup> For example, as a result of paramilitary forces being used to disperse people from vital market places.

<sup>12</sup> It is my personal conviction, that no-preventative advance action to counter covid-19 would have been a better strategy in Africa than undermining economies. People's own capacities should have been strengthened, by their being inspired, especially by encouraging the church to emphasise the Lordship of Christ, to prepare to care for each other. Even concerns for hygiene, communicated to people who have largely ignored such concerns all their lives, can be like incomprehensible thunderbolts from out of the blue.

## Why Scientists shouldn't be leading the way out of the Coronavirus crisis: 10 reasons from Africa.

This is one of Jim Harries' articles on covid-19 in Africa, 21st April 2020.

Session on academia.edu on 21<sup>st</sup> April 2020.



**Nalrobl** - 300 people put on forced quarantine for flouting Covid-19 rules

**Health & Science** - Hope as virus cases below projections

Above. Two adjoining news items in the *Standard* news service in Kenya, home page, 20.4.20. Of-course these two news items are not related or mutually causative at all ...<sup>13</sup>

Some centuries ago, science might have played little or no part in countering a pandemic, such as today's breakout of covid-19. Today, few have questioned the rule of science in determining courses of action. This has been a serious omission. Here are 10 reasons, from African perspective, why science should not rule. Undue domination by science can result in excesses of:

1. **Oppression.** Today, all over the world, results of scientific work are being used to oppress people. E.g. in parts of Africa people have been caned for not wearing a mask, (whereas until recently even the WHO was saying that masks weren't a helpful prophylaxis). To some, the benefits of mandating what is required by science justify costs, such as punishment of infringers. In the West, where science awareness is at

<sup>13</sup> While hygiene and use of disinfectants is understood to reduce viral levels, journalists do not seem to have realised that threat of an unpleasant forced quarantine experience can reduce reporting of viral cases.

high levels, that makes sense. The notion that science should call the shots is much less familiar in much of Africa. It is harder for people to get their heads around this, when they are used to blaming witches and spirits for their problems. Being pulled up short by science (e.g. being punished for not wearing a mask, or ignoring social-distancing) is more of a shock in Africa.

2. **Suffering.** The mathematics underlying the logic of science is harsh: the end is considered to justify diverse means. Parallel cases, such as cancer treatments, leave people open to choose: ‘do they want chemotherapy or not?’ This time around, there’s no choice.
  - Ignoring of suffering is most acute when prescriptions drawn up for one context are auto-transferred to another: what is the point of ‘flattening the curve’ if health-care givers ‘don’t care’, and / or health care systems are too weak to benefit from such flattening?<sup>14</sup> Causing economic carnage by forcing social-distancing for the sake of an ‘unachievable’ science may be cruelty.<sup>15</sup>
3. **Privileging the Elite.** Global elites, such as populations in Europe and the USA, who got this pandemic early, have hegemonized media content around science. Decisions made by national governments in the West (or bodies like the WHO,<sup>16</sup> who are predominantly funded by national governments of Western countries) are based on an understanding of their own populations. Their decisions may be much less apt for others whose contexts are vastly different. Yet their logic dominates the whole globe.

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<sup>14</sup> For discussion on a lack of fit of Western medical services in Africa, see: Harries, Jim 2011. ‘The Magical Worldview in the African Church: what is going on?’ 203-224 In: Harries, Jim, 2011. *Vulnerable Mission; insights into Christian Mission to Africa from a position of vulnerability*. Pasadena: William Carey Library.

<sup>15</sup> Some might think that African countries have freely *chosen* to apply strict social-distancing criteria. On the contrary, I would argue, the prominence of advocacy for such strategies over almost all available media makes it practically impossible to avoid following them without potentially enormous political cost. The ‘unachievable science’ I refer to here, is the likelihood that lowering the curve will reduce overall mortality, especially given the long-term effect on economies (and mortality rates) arising from extended periods of lock-down.

<sup>16</sup> World Health Organisation.

The ignoring by the media in the West of the predicament of people elsewhere in the world is not new, but is it excusable? Unknown but towering heights of suffering amongst the poor have been caused in India by lockdown in its cities.<sup>17</sup> This is quietly forgotten or ignored. Perhaps that is a kind of numbness that science-orientation induces.

4. **Ignoring Alternative Solutions.** Aggressive advocacy of any one solution is bound to relegate alternative possibilities. Hence a domination of science as controlling authority relativizes the importance of caring, empathy, self-sacrifice for the other, friendship, compassion, love, tenderness, devotion, prayer, bible-teaching, encouragement and so on ... that become mere handmaidens to the dominant scientific agenda. Failure to sufficiently emphasize the above by other means has resulted in medical doctors at times becoming majorly pre-occupied with non-medical activities, like encouraging frightened people.<sup>18</sup> Were they less frightened, were more efforts made elsewhere to reassure people, medical doctors could concentrate on medicine. Outside of the West, the above suggests we may be experiencing revivals in witchcraft fears and necromancy. (These are traditional African avenues of response to crises. These responses can be very destructive of social fabric. Both necromancy and witchcraft are discouraged by Christian churches. Forcing churches to close reduces their ability at deterring them.)
5. **Empowering the dispassionate.** With no disrespect to our great scientists who have spent decades laboring over test-tubes and statistical tables; such a career path is not necessarily the best preparation for the expression of compassionate empathetic comprehension of holistic human needs. Today's rule of science is endeavoring, it seems, to totally sideline 'the people's choice'. What do I mean by 'the people's choice'? Those leaders of the people who *freely* receive tithes from the masses on a weekly basis,<sup>19</sup> who are trusted to

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52276606> This report tells of their subsequently seeking to escape from quarantine centres.

<sup>18</sup> Personal conversation with a GP in the UK.

<sup>19</sup> Since their inception, many people have been incredibly generous to churches, resulting in proliferations of church buildings, employment of pastors, many compassionate programs, and activities to include all kinds of marginalised people. I emphasise that the voluntary nature of such contributions speaks loudly, when most other influential institutions in the world outside of family, are either profit-making, or governing bodies.

guide key events: weddings, funerals, baptisms, even responses to disasters. The same people have training and experience in administering the compassion of God in a way that soothes hurting hearts, i.e. pastors, the clergy.

6. **Promoting what is not scientific.** Science is carried out by, and implemented by people. Which scientific discoveries to follow up on and how to interpret them, is always a subjective choice, or set of choices. Through various ‘accidents of history’, (especially, it seems China having initiated it), the dominant strategy for countering covid-19 has been the incredibly cruel practice of inter-human isolation. The choice of strict social-distancing for countering covid-19 was subjective, and not made on a scientific basis. Sweden, for example, has followed a different practice.<sup>20</sup> Had all Europe done like Sweden, and only Sweden itself had done lock-down, then dominant scientific evidence sought for and publicised could have been very different from what it is now. The realization, in other words, that science operates on the basis of human choices, preferences, and paradigm shifts, has been ignored.<sup>21</sup> That a strategy has to be applied, is hardly questionable. That a particular strategy somewhere caught on, and that everyone else who wants to be respectable has to follow the same, is another issue.
7. **Hopelessness.** The ‘life at all costs’ (on a scientific basis) logic underlying today’s anti-covid-19 strategies takes little account of quality of life, or quality of death. It is a digital understanding of life. Life is taken as yea or nay. This is certainly not the default understanding for many people’s around the world, who consider that a person can have more or less ‘life’.<sup>22</sup>

In Africa, where people continue to laugh and ‘party’ in the face of what would in Europe be considered impending disaster, the thought that one should react to and anticipate a calamity before it comes can be very

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/30/sweden-coronavirus-approach-is-very-different-from-the-rest-of-europe.html>

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Kuhn introduced the world to the notion of paradigm shifts: Kuhn, T.S., 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>22</sup> A common greeting in a number of African languages known to me, could be translated into English as ‘are you alive?’ For example, in the Luo language of Kenya; *ingima?* The response ‘a little bit’ (*matin*) indicates ‘partial life’. We could translate that as ‘I’m suffering from poor health,’ or ‘I’m not well.’

strange. As it is strange, so unfamiliar, so hard to implement amongst a people who just do not think that way.<sup>23</sup>

8. **Disenfranchising pre-scientific people.** The disenfranchisement that happens when people are forced to address their problems using means from way beyond their habitual experience and wisdom, is demeaning. It points to a future in which the non-Western world might have to be the obedient pawn to their scientifically-enlightened superiors for perpetuity.
9. **Disregarding translation.** The fact that English is in use in Africa does not mean that English terms and phrases are understood in the same way in Africa as they are in the UK and the USA. To simplify a little; this is because people root their understanding of English in their comprehension of their own languages and cultures. Because their own languages and cultures are typically very different from those of Europe, their grasp of European languages will inevitably be extremely slanted. This means that even apparently (to Europeans) very simple and clear instructions and explanations can be grossly misunderstood. What is needed here, are not scientists, but cultural translators.
10. **Presupposing Christ.** The understanding that it is appropriate and morally desirable to give one's own life for others, a peculiarly Christian standard (not even shared by many Christian believers in today's majority world who are more oriented to personal prosperity), has now become a required presupposed norm for science to be effective. That is; the science being applied to resolve coronavirus presupposes a certain appreciation of 'care for the other' (who may be unrelated) that frankly is not universal to humankind. Presupposing something that is absent yet necessary for incumbent strategies to work, may be condemning much of the world to mayhem: In Africa, people are not used to being asked to incur individual loss for the sake of a distant other (e.g. for a young person to be forced into lockdown, when danger to their own life from covid-19 is very minimal).

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<sup>23</sup> I am often struck by how this works in terms of economics. Westerners reading and responding urgently to futurist economic indicators long before things actually deteriorate on the ground. Africa is much better known for being 'hand-to-mouth.' The latter is vastly different.

Frightening quarantine facilities coupled with people's fear of being separated from family and loved ones, makes it less likely that they will seek for medical treatment at the point of their greatest need. A few directives from WHO don't instantly change the carry-over of how people have always responded throughout their history. The latter requires conversion to faith in Christ, that can take generations to bring ongoing profound change.

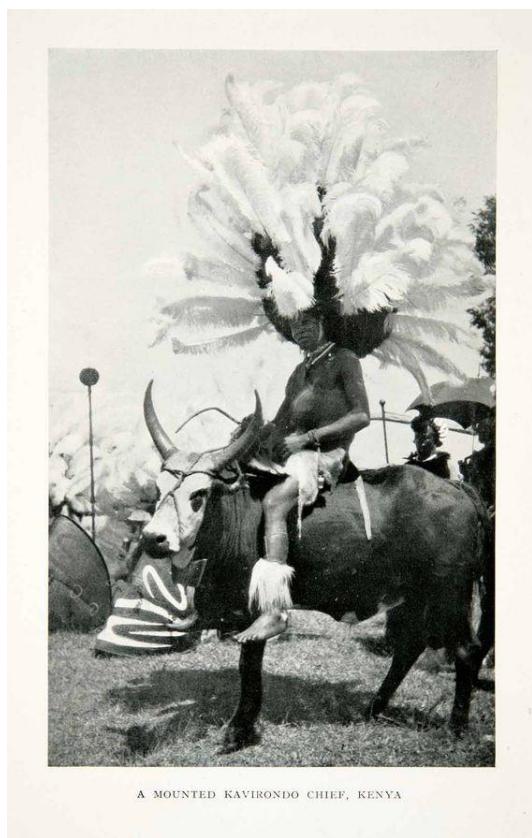
### **Conclusion.**

What should be done differently following the above? Non-Western countries, or in fact any country, should not be forced, by being paid, and by a hegemonic information system (media) run from outside, to follow counter-covid strategies that do not fit their context.

In particular, strategies applied to counter covid-19 by Western nations, assume people to be deeply formed through centuries of Christian history, such as to have a profound appreciation of the value of giving oneself sacrificially for others, in ways that may be largely unfamiliar outside of the Christian West.

There ought to be at least three men on the platform advocating strategies for tackling coronavirus. One, perhaps, a scientist. Two, a man with a big heart who is close to God. Thirdly, a politician.

## Covid-19 and revenge on the dead / dependence on the dead in Africa today.



By Jim Harries. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020.

*Academia.edu session, 23.4.20*

I here consider ways in which revenge is taken on behalf of the dead, with reference to the history of the Luo people of Kenya.

Luo language version: “Ka jaduong’ maduong’ otho ... Chieng’ni mar buru monde yuak duk ka gisedo oko kendo gibukore gi / buru ka gimienore gi owuoch dhok ... Yauwuot ng’ato motho bende dhi buru ka gitwego lep apowa kata amina: to wuoi maduong’ chwowo kondo kata ochimb wuon, gi tong’e e lwete. To ka joburo duogo, kamoro giduogo gi agoro maduong’, kata giduogo gi jogegi monego e thim kuno, ka giting’o.” Ka giduogo

monde gi mon mobiro yuak, wuok romo ni joburu, gi nyiri gi chwo duto ma nodong’ e dala mosea kwonde duto mobiro yuak.<sup>24</sup> (The book from which these words were taken was reportedly first published in 1938.)

Picture 1. Kavirondo is these days known as ‘Luo land’, i.e. Nyanza Province of Kenya. The above picture is of unknown date, but presumably about 100 years old.

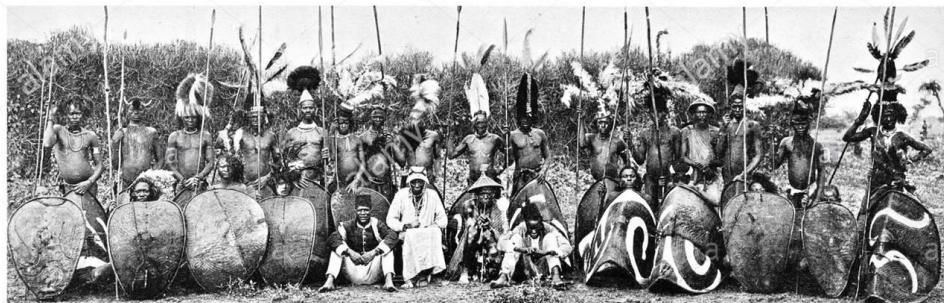
English translation: “When a senior man dies ... that day of *buru* (dust) his wives wail while naked as they lament outside and throw dust over themselves while smearing themselves with the faeces of cattle ... the sons<sup>25</sup> of the man who has died also go with *buru* as they wear twisted and other skins. The

<sup>24</sup> Mboya, Paul, *Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*, (A Handbook of Luo Customs.) 6<sup>th</sup> Printing 1997, 131-132. These you tube videos illustrate something of the ceremony in practice. They do not mention the killing that used to go on as a part of the ceremony.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arOpcHeBv9A> ,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNXS2Wecjzk> , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-JJ-xUdyNY> .

<sup>25</sup> This would include his paternal nephews, and others.

eldest son puts on the hat or crown of his father, with his father's spear in his hand. The men of



a alamy stock photo

CMTEHD  
www.alamy.com

Picture 2. Luo Warriors, 1925. This picture illustrates the kinds of garb likely to have been worn by the sons of the late old man as they engaged in *tero buru*.<sup>26</sup>

*buru* come back again in jubilant mayhem. Alternatively, they might come carrying those of their fellows who have been killed there in the bush. As they come back their women and the wives of the late come crying, setting out to meet the men of *buru*, with girls and other men who had remained in the home who had already come from all around the area to wail for the deceased.”<sup>27</sup>

A key question in interpretation of the above text relates to the terms: “Alternatively, they might come carrying those of their fellows who have been killed there in the bush.” Such reference to killing as a part of *tero buru* (literally, taking the dust, the name given to this ceremony), is absent in the

<sup>26</sup> There are currently over 5 million Luo people in Kenya.

<https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001361377/2019-census-results-tyranny-of-big-tribes>

<sup>27</sup> My translation, made on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2020. Here is a published translation: “On this day, the deceased wives and all those who had stripped naked ran all over weeping and mourning. They decorated themselves with ash and smeared cow dung on themselves. The sons of the dead man attended the burial ceremony wearing torn and worn out skin garments (*lep apowa kata amina*). The eldest son wore his father’s crown, *osimbo*, and carried his spear. When these people involved in the pre-burial ceremony returned home, they came back either jubilantly singing ritual songs, or carrying the bodies of their people killed by the enemy. This time everybody wept. The people who remained at home together with the eldest wife, wearing her late husband’s *tora*, went out to meet the returning pre-burial party.” Mboya, Paul. Nd, *Paul Mboya’s Luo Kitgi gi Timbegi*. A translation into English by Jane Achieng’. Nairobi: Atai Joint Limited, 107-108.

you tube videos mentioned in footnote 1. I suggest that this is because recent interpreters of the *tero buru* ceremony have tried to cleanse it of its more violent character. Reference by Mboya to the effect that “*thuondi geto ngoche moluoro lweny*,”<sup>28</sup> i.e. “the courageous men rebuke the cowards who feared fighting,” soon after the account of *tero buru*, and other evidence, favours the interpretation that after the death of an old man, his sons (nephews, etc.) went in search of blood.

Assuming that my interpretation of *tero buru* above is correct, I want to use it to make a point about traditional Luo and by implication traditional African practice. That is, that in traditional Africa, people attempt to avenge deaths, especially those of important old men. In this case, revenge is done through the sons of the late moving into bush (unpopulated) areas or previous battlefields (where fighting regularly occurs), with the intention of provoking an encounter with whoever they might meet. In other cases, people sit together to decide who is the likely person to have killed the late through witchcraft, and then either using witchcraft or by physical killing, avenge the death by ‘murdering’ the person found guilty.

The continued operation of the above principle of looking for a victim when one suffers a setback, was in Kenya demonstrated during the 2008 post-election violence: With some encouragement from national leaders, tribes translated their own lack of prosperity into active killing of members of other tribes assumed responsible. The church was caught off guard. Thousands fled, and over a thousand were killed.

The transforming of East Africa from warring tribes into today’s much more peaceful co-existence, has been due to the Church, following the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is why in areas of Africa relatively untouched by the Gospel, such as parts of the Sahel, and Somalia, warmongering continues to be endemic.

Here is my source of concern. Church buildings have been closed. People (who don’t have sophisticated access to the internet, and even many that do) have lost access to their pastors and Christian family. Vicious gossip, that the church actively repels, is presumably flourishing. We are anticipating going into a time of enormous morbidity and high mortality. When people go back to their traditional ways of dealing with these things, killings and depravity arising from

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<sup>28</sup> Mboya, *Luo*, 134.

the taking of revenge against presumed killers may bring more mortality than that arising from coronavirus itself.<sup>29</sup>

I want to elaborate on the above analysis concerning revenge with reference to Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Thriving in Africa into Modern Times

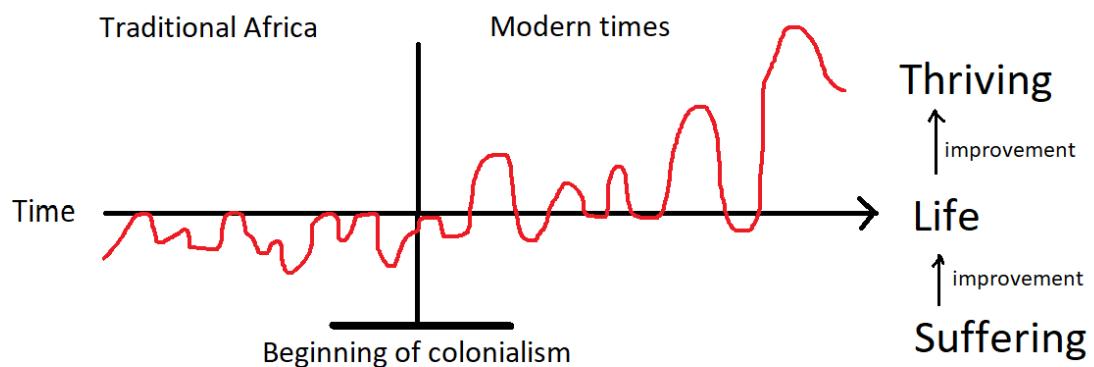


Figure 1 illustrates traditional African levels of suffering, and changes wrought since colonial times. The horizontal line in the centre, labelled 'life', represents aspired-to standards of living in pre-colonial times. The red line depicts levels of suffering and thriving. These may be of an individual, family, community, and so on. Apart from the fact that standards of living have risen since colonial times, I want my reader to notice that before colonialism standards of living never moved above a certain level. That was a kind of 'default level'. I want to explain now why that is.

Traditional African ways of life aspired to a condition in which what we might call bad<sup>30</sup> was absent. Suffering of any kind was always caused by a 'bad' witch,

<sup>29</sup> Many factors are obviously inter-related. Many African economies are already enormously damaged due to efforts at social-distancing. In East Africa, we are anyway in the 'hungry time' (that lasts until July, or later, until the next harvest is ready). Morbidity and mortality arising from coronavirus will aggravate accusations of killing and action of taking revenge. Investing in such revenge will aggravate mortality and morbidity arising from coronavirus, and so on. Some recent changes might have positive impacts – for example children not being at school has made them available for farm work, so perhaps agricultural production has expanded, and so on.

<sup>30</sup> I prefer the term 'bad' to 'evil'. (Harries, Jim, 2007, 'Pragmatic Theory Applied to Christian Mission in Africa: with special reference to Luo responses to 'bad' in Gem, Kenya.' PhD

or a ‘bad spirit’.<sup>31</sup> As a result, African people were and are strongly inclined to producing ‘thriving’ by doing away with witches and spirits. In other words: in traditional African worldviews, no one aspired to a ‘positive’, they only aspired to getting rid of what is negative, to achieve what I have above called ‘default’ levels of thriving. This view has not disappeared. It is still very prominent today.

Simplifying, we could say that colonialism brought two new things. (I say this is simplifying, because more profoundly, both of these originate in faith in God.)

1. It brought faith in God.

2. It brought means to thriving.

This faith in the Christian God, is faith in one who can not only deal with what is negative or bad to result in a default level of thriving (typified by instances in which Jesus drives away bad spirits, such as Luke 4:31-44). Rather, God can also bring about a positive. Without going into a lot of detail; Western Christians have become particularly adept at perceiving and instigating such positives. They have been able to do so by perceiving an arena of flourishing in life which arises from other-than removal of bad spirits. This perception is variously known as bringing development, modernity, dualism, and in some respects, technology, science, and so on. African people on the whole have not grasped the means of this source of ‘good’ that Westerners draw on. This is why Africa remains grossly dependent on the West, and interprets thriving as coming from God. (Thriving does come from God. Unfortunately, the mechanisms routinely understood by the West by which this happens tend to be beyond African comprehension. Hence we get the ‘prosperity gospel’ in Africa, but scientific and technological (including biological, chemical, physical etc.) mechanisms of thriving extant in Europe.)

Recent centuries have brought what we could call a ‘linguistic’ problem to Africa; although it is really a lingua-cultural problem. Through failing to perceive where African people are in their thinking, and for other reasons, instead of assistance to Africa being oriented to taking people from where they

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Thesis, 76.) The University of Birmingham. <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/15/> (accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2010).

<sup>31</sup> The person suffering would consider a witch to be guilty. In order to avoid blame, others may consider someone else’s suffering to have arisen from their breaking of an ancestral taboo, i.e. suffering as being caused by ancestors. I have put ‘spirit’ into scare quotes, as I find this term to be a misleading translation of indigenous African language uses.

are to where they perhaps ought to be (more thriving), it has ignored the scenario we are depicting in Figure 1, so is assuming that African people already knew (know) how to thrive by means other than removal of bad spirits.<sup>32</sup> This is today's educational system in Africa, that operates in European languages – i.e. presupposes rather than imparts European comprehension.<sup>33</sup>

I am bringing the above scenario to our attention at this point because of its pertinence in the covid-19 crisis. During every-other major crisis faced by African countries since mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, the West has been in a position to step in and intervene. In effect, because of its unique capability at perceiving 'thriving', it has enabled Africa to dig itself out of its situation. The current crisis being enormous in scale and global wide, plus the presence of severe travel restrictions, means that this may be much more difficult this time around. This portends very badly for Africa's ability to tackle the covid-19 pandemic on its own soil.

The solution to the strong tendency to seek to do away with what is bad to resolve an issue, is found in the teachings of the church. The absence of that 'solution' is likely to lead to a return to the violence-of-revenge of pre-colonial times. It will also cut an essential part of the means towards Africa being able to design its own positive.

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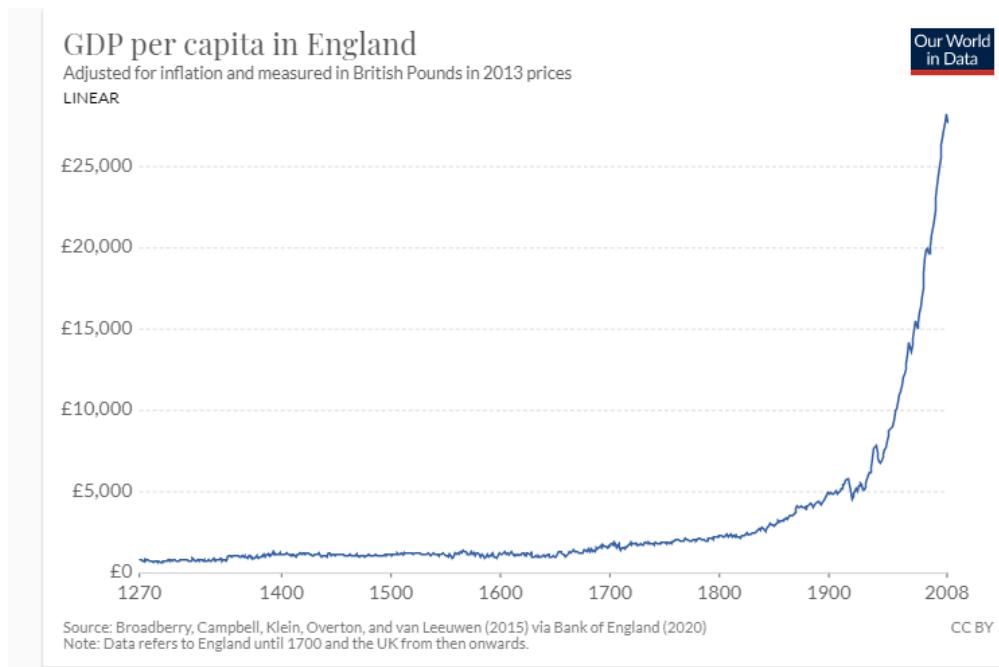
<sup>32</sup> The reasons for this are diverse, and I will not go into them in detail here. I believe this problem has been particularly ignored since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Anti-racism has contributed. So also has foreign aid to Africa. Foreign aid supporting what looked familiar to the West tended to underwrite what was foreign rather than what was indigenous to Africa. Hence what has appeared European that has incorrectly presupposed African understanding has consistently been supported, whereas what could enable African understanding has been ignored.

<sup>33</sup> Individuals in Africa may get to perceive some of the foundations for European thriving. They may struggle to implement these in contexts in which the masses are not with them. An understanding of something that makes sense in one context often falls far short of knowing how to implement it in another very different context.

## The Covid-19 pandemic with respect to Africa, in historical-economic perspective.<sup>34</sup>

By Jim Harries, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

Note: The economic model that I presuppose in this article is not a materialist one. That is, I take ways in which the provision of capital defined the difference between pre-1650 and post-1650 levels of economic prosperity in Europe as secondary. (To date, much ‘aid’ to Africa presupposes this to be primary.) Instead, I take the original power-house of economic-growth to arise from other changes in human understanding. For example, as arising from the demotion of envy, that has otherwise in history deterred individuals (or individual-groups) from innovating in ways that raise their own economic level above that of their colleagues. (Envy can be demoted in this way when whole communities become passionately devoted to serving God.) Such ‘demotion’ of envy in turn enabled accumulation of capital. So then, demotion of envy is primary, and accumulation of capital is secondary.



I begin my analysis with the above graph, to give us some historical perspective. “The UK is particularly interesting as it was the first economy that

<sup>34</sup> All the economic data and citations in this article, including the content of the box below, are taken from <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-growth>

achieved sustained economic growth and thereby previously unimaginable prosperity for the majority of the population.”<sup>35</sup>

Please note:

Economic history is a very simple story. It is a story that has only two parts:

The first part is the very long time in which the average person was very poor and human societies achieved no economic growth to change this.

Incomes remained almost unchanged over a period of several centuries when compared to the increase in incomes over the last 2 centuries. Life too changed remarkably little. What people used as shelter, food, clothing, energy supply, their light source stayed very similar for a very long time. Almost all that ordinary people used and consumed in the 17th century would have been very familiar to people living a thousand or even a couple of thousand years earlier. Average incomes (as measured by GDP per capita) in England between the year 1270 and 1650 were £1,051 when measured in today’s prices.

The second part is much shorter, it encompasses only the last few generations and is radically different from the first part, it is a time in which the income of the average person grew immensely – from an average of £1051 incomes per person per year increased to over £30,000 a 29-fold increase in prosperity. This means an average person in the UK today has a higher income in two weeks than an average person in the past had in an entire year. Since the total sum of incomes is the total sum of production this also means that the production of the average person in two weeks today is equivalent to the production of the average person in an entire year in the past. There is just one truly important event in the economic history of the world, the onset of economic growth. This is the one transformation that changed everything.

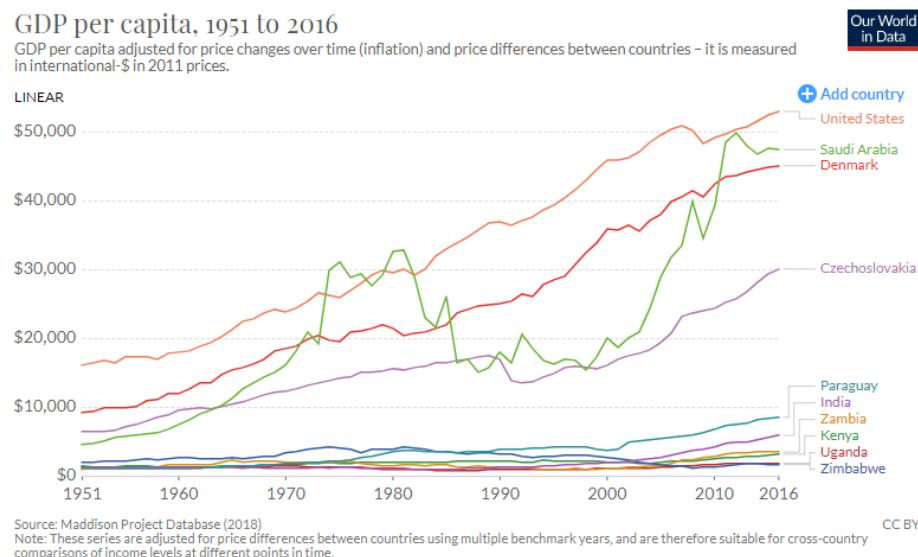
I want to use the above depiction of reality as a foundation from which to ask questions about contemporary Africa. Without the above perspective, the questions may not make sense.<sup>36</sup> One basic question I want to ask: has Africa learned to do the same as has the UK, or has the economic growth it has recently achieved been fundamentally ‘fed from the outside’?

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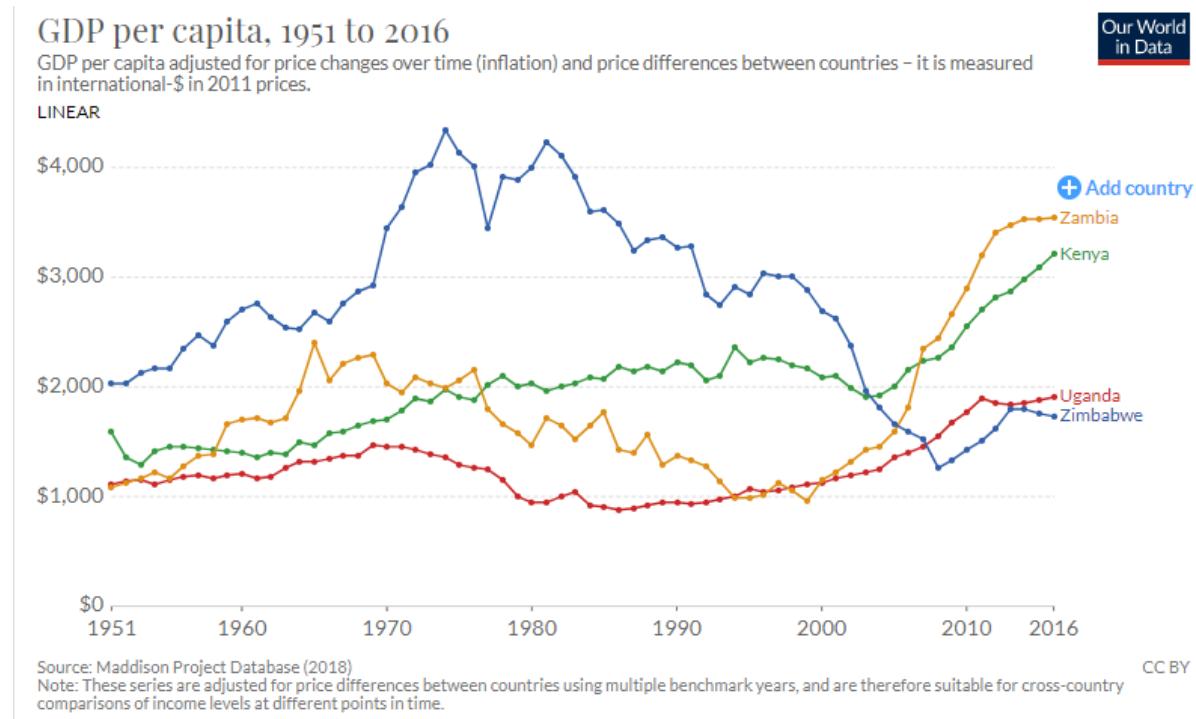
<sup>35</sup> Other countries have followed suit.

<sup>36</sup> The assumption that the last two centuries should be the ‘norm’ implies that anything but ‘economic growth’ is unnatural. Hence I have gone back to before the modern era.

African countries have certainly not matched the GDP growth of other countries:<sup>37</sup>



The situation of the above four African countries becomes in some ways clearer when one removes the more prosperous economies from the chart, as below.



<sup>37</sup> A few other countries are chosen for comparison. The four African countries included here, and India and Paraguay (that also use non-indigenous languages for official purposes), remain way down towards the bottom of this scale.

I believe it is important to read the above data in the context of today's globalization. I believe the data can be taken to in some ways 'demonstrate' that growth in GDP in these, and other African countries, can be accounted for by the degree of guidance and control that the countries concerned have recently been receiving from foreigners.<sup>38</sup>

Although my evidence above is statistical and economic, when I combine it with other observations which would take too long to explain in this short article,<sup>39</sup> I suggest that African people as a whole have not 'grasped' whatever it is that it takes to replicate the kinds of economic growth shown in the charts above that have occurred elsewhere in the world. On that basis, I suggest that, should they lose the kinds of support and aid from outside that they are used to, African economies may quickly revert to the economic level of 1950, or earlier.<sup>40</sup> In the above graph 1950 levels of income are very close to the £1051 already mentioned; the average income in England between 1270 and 1650. In other words, in simple terms: basic African ways of life have not modernized.<sup>41</sup>

I want to extrapolate from the above. While the above figures I believe support my extrapolation, it is based on much more than this. For various reasons that I also do not go into in this short article: sub-Saharan African populations have not reached the equivalent to 1650 levels of economic development in the UK. Commonly held expectations in the Western world that they are catching up ('developing'), modern, comparable to Europe and so on are simply untrue.

**This will become apparent when covid-19 takes a deeper and deeper hold on Africa in the next few months.** It will show how Africa thrives almost entirely on outside support and control. Pretending that is not the case by inventing all kinds of optimistic stories has been a self-defeating pastime, that has perhaps been a means for the West's avoiding taking responsibility for the continent.

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<sup>38</sup> I have not carried out any controlled-trials to demonstrate what I believe the above charts establish. To seriously engage in such an undertaking is way beyond my capability. Even if such were professionally and expertly undertaken, much room would always remain for different interpretations.

<sup>39</sup> I point my reader to my published work that discusses these issues in more detail, most of which can be found here: <https://jimharries.academia.edu/research>

<sup>40</sup> Comparable data is not available pre-1950.

<sup>41</sup> 'Required' areas of modernization typically falling within the realm of the category 'religion' have resulted in their in recent decades largely being ignored by the international community, that claims to be secular.

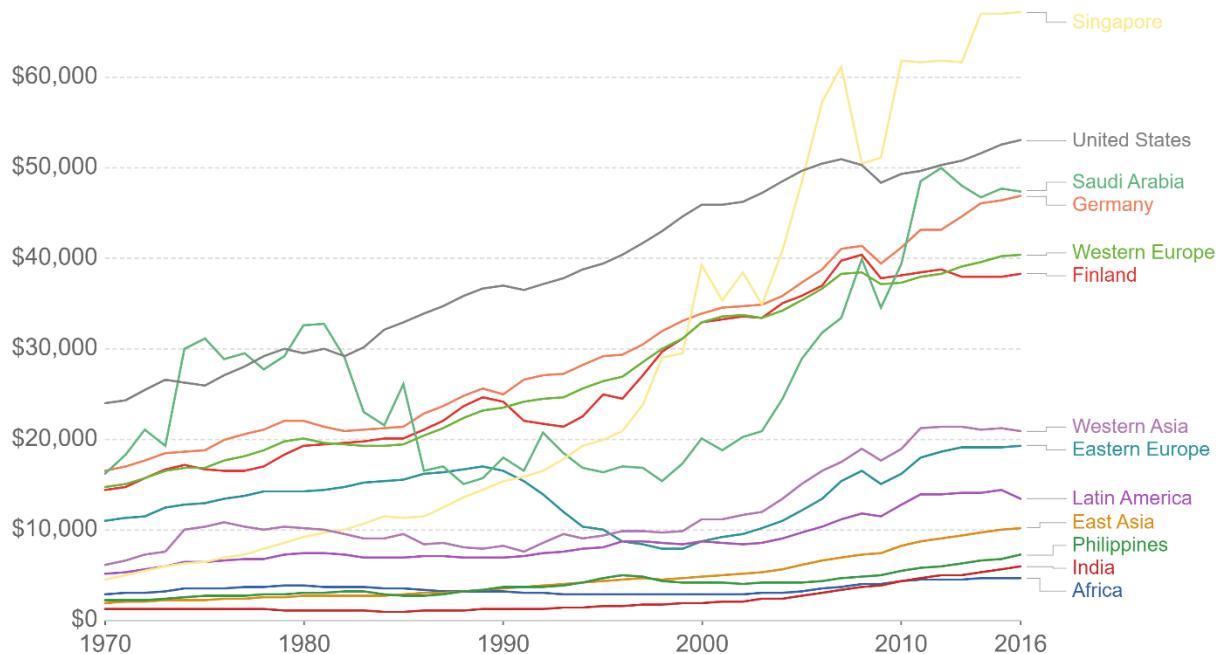
A few points regarding why the situation is as it is. 1. Anti-racism in the West, that refuses to accept any ‘inferiority’ (i.e. cultural features that represent ‘pre-modern’ ways of life) on the side of Black people even when they are staring you in the face, has blanked out important issues that have needed urgent attention. 2. Charitable aid for various reasons always dominating enabling interventions consistently tip the economic equation for recipients in Africa towards preferring ignorance and untruth with short-term advantage over truth and understanding with long term benefit. As a result, European languages dominate almost everywhere. These languages making little sense of native ways of life are a hopeless foundation on which to build indigenously-powered development. (See chart below.) 3. The inexcusable failure of the West, that has guided African development, to look constructively at the pivotal role that so-called ‘religion’ has played in their own history, has resulted in its role in African development being largely ignored.

Africa, India and the Philippines are renowned for their use of English (or other European languages) for official purposes, and they have the lowest GDPs in the world.

### GDP per capita, 1970 to 2016

Our World in Data

GDP per capita adjusted for price changes over time (inflation) and price differences between countries – it is measured in international-\$ in 2011 prices.



Source: Maddison Project Database (2018)

Note: These series are adjusted for price differences between countries using multiple benchmark years, and are therefore suitable for cross-country comparisons of income levels at different points in time.

## A Snapshot of Life in Africa in Covid-19 Times (April 2020)

By Jim Harries. 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Giving a better idea of what's going on may help policy makers, strategists, philosophers and theologians considering how to respond to the impact of coronavirus on Africa ... I share some aspects of African community life in covid-times.

It was on a Saturday around mid-March, when Christians were discouraged rather than forbidden to meet ... that I cycled for over an hour from home to join a congregation in an 'indigenous' church. Known as *Roho*, these churches are Christianizing African approaches to problem solving.

Leaving my shoes in the doorway, I joined the row of robe-clad men at the front facing the congregation. Men and some boys to our left facing us sat on chairs. Many more women and girls on our right, mostly sat on the floor. The hubbub of a gathering crowd (perhaps 100 people in all) dimmed after a signal from the front. Then it picked up again, as all stood and turned to the back. Only the back door was left open. All at once, everyone started clapping and stamping, shouting loudly as they always do, telling bad spirits to leave the building. Pertinently, a man's voice rose above the sound of the rest of the congregation: "Coronavirus leave! We are chasing you away. Coronavirus leave! We don't want you. Coronavirus leave! Coronavirus leave!"<sup>42</sup> All present echoed the same. Soon the congregation turned to face the front. We engaged in a variety of songs and prayers, drums beating loudly. Then a word of prophecy was passed to the front: "We should chase corona away again." We did so, much as the first time. ... From there on the service went on much as it usually does. Except, it seemed to me, although I might have been wrong, that the large drums slung over young men's shoulders were beaten harder than ever, as if they wanted any corona viruses left over from the prayers to be shattered to death! The drumming made my insides shake.<sup>43</sup>

"Stay at home!" came the message, loudly and clearly, a few days later over radio and other media. The message was repeated again and again. "People must stay at home! Staying at home will save lives!" Then there was a curfew,

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<sup>42</sup> The languages originally used in all events described in this short piece were either Luo or Swahili. The English is my translation.

<sup>43</sup> Ours was a smaller indoor-version of this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kzy6NscZbp8>

that mandated the above requirement for night-hours. During the day though, while things have probably been quieter than usual, I re-discovered an aspect of African life a little different than that in Europe: People don't easily believe when they are told there is a crisis, until they see things going wrong with their own eyes.<sup>44</sup> People love the freedom of doing what they want in their own lives? Who can blame them! Officially, the reason 'lock-down' has been impossible, is because people need to work every day to make money for food, and then to go and buy it (the buying of which enables someone else to make their daily bread). Not everyone in town was either working or buying or selling though. Clearly, hanging around town is much more desirable than spending the whole day sitting in what is probably a one-room house, mud floor, hot iron roof, perhaps without a TV, communal toilet or bathroom. Home may be full of noisy children, pots and pans, and other things being washed and scrubbed; in short, not male territory. For many, if not all, 'staying at home' has a very different feel to it than for folks in Europe, for whom it is said 'my house is my castle'! So, many working, and many 'hanging around'. Unless the paramilitary is sent in, people aren't likely to change this behavior. (At the end of March, the paramilitary did disperse markets with the aim of increasing social distancing.)

I find the saying that in Europe one is 'innocent unless proven guilty' whereas in Africa one is 'guilty unless proven innocent,' generally true.<sup>45</sup> The view in Africa is that what stops people doing bad things is fear of retribution. Those responsible for bringing retribution are usually the dead. If the dead are not able to act (the way we should be dealing with coronavirus is new, so the dead don't know about it), then proactive-violence is the alternative.

There is a gross contrast in background! Whereas on the whole, the British countryside may be populated with sweet sounding song-birds, nice flowers, beautiful views, fresh air, monuments demonstrating a romantic view of the past, and wholesome exercise, things are very different in Africa.<sup>46</sup> Instead of sweet-sounding song-birds we have wild-animals oriented simply to getting

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<sup>44</sup> It seems to me ironic, that whereas some Westerners consider that Africans live in a world populated by unseen beings, Westerners also fear unseen things, like viruses, and *anticipated* disasters that have not yet happened.

<sup>45</sup> The notion that people are essentially good is much more a Christian one, that is challenging African tradition.

<sup>46</sup> Of course, I am generalising. I am also taking a perspective as a Westerner, noticing things, and noticing things in ways, that my African colleagues might see quite differently.

food. Instead of nice flowers, flowers go largely unnoticed.<sup>47</sup> Views are dominated by economics; trees have monetary value, grass could be eaten by cattle, and so on. Smoky air may be preferred to the fresh version, especially if it means food is cooking! Monuments, if anything, are to death; concrete structures that remain where houses once stood are usually graves. Our exercise, is slogging away in our fields (actually, especially in good company, not such a bad pastime). So, I discovered one night when 15 rough looking men carrying truncheons, clubs and whips turned up at my door! The approach to a crisis may be to arm one's youth against assumed violent enemies. (Thankfully they did not use their weapons, but were just checking up on things, and probably trying to instill some more fear.)

'Openness to all' is, as far as I am concerned, one of the most attractive parts of life in Africa. Whether one visits people at meal-time. Whether you are a foreigner or a local. Whether child or adult – a beautiful aspect of African life, is the open door. The opposite, behaving tight-fisted, excluding people, being unwelcoming, being stingy in how you hand out food portions, and so on, are despised behaviors.<sup>48</sup> Even when dangers might be very real, it will not do to make too much of them if they interfere with this openness. Excessive emphasis on safety from a virus by social distancing, can be taken to be like inviting a curse, or self-identifying as a witch.

The content of the above paragraph means that warning children that running around outside and playing with their friends could result in a 'hidden enemy' killing grandma, is hard to swallow! If locking-down adults has been difficult, then I think locking-down children is even more so. Unless use of corporal punishment, it would seem impossible. I think that's why, throughout the coronavirus crisis to date, children have run around as freely as ever – enjoying an unexpected, extended school holiday! How then to prevent them spreading covid-19, though, remains a mystery.

Perhaps most joyous of recent experiences, followed my being advised by one of our bishops: that visiting believers in current circumstances is OK! (I interpret that as being 'as long as one keeps to social-distancing rules!' ...

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<sup>47</sup> As always, there are some important translation issues here. For example, what we refer to as 'flowers' in the UK, are not what the translation of the term into Swahili generally refers to.

<sup>48</sup> I am not saying that everyone is infinitely generous, open and welcoming, but that compared to my experience in the UK, they behave as if they are.

Christians have often faced trials. Cancelling of all church fellowships has been a recent example of this. Many have gone a month or more without attending church or meeting fellow believers. They have probably wondered what has happened to their pastors, who themselves are concerned not to break the law and be found responsible for spreading a virus! (It is possible that some churches have been gathering in the early mornings before the police are active, practicing spacing within their congregations. I wouldn't know.) So then, more than a month after church-buildings' closure, two of us set out to visit and encourage church members. It was a little confusing at the beginning, as usually the first thing is 'come into our sitting room', but instead we stood outside, masks on (at least in my case), standing or sitting well apart from each other. My joy in doing this, was to see that relieved blissful expression on people's faces after a month without Christian fellowship; to hear God's word, be prayed for, and discover that someone cared enough to pay them a visit.