Mapinduzi Journal 6

Africa in a changing world

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Mapinduzi in a world shaken by pandemic and war

Christiane Kayser*

This new Mapinduzi Journal is being published with some delay and, contrary to our usual practice, touches on several essential themes.

We last met with Mapinduzi colleagues in St Louis, Senegal in February 2019. Our discussions revolved around the role of young people in Africa today and governance issues. We also honoured the memory of our Malian friend and colleague Ambroise Dakouo. You will find a tribute to him at the beginning of this publication. May the earth rest lightly upon him!

First the Covid-19 pandemic changed our habits and almost brought the world to a standstill, now Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is changing the world around us and influencing relations between people and nations, between the South and the North.

In this publication, we have therefore decided to look at several facets of the transformations and their repercussions, always with a view to countering the divisions that threaten us and to finding paths towards a dialogue of equals.

A first theme is that of **European racism** towards Africans, which seems to be resuscitating or at least is becoming more visible. Although progress has been made, for example, in terms of the restitution of artefacts and the voice of Black citizens in some countries, the general trend is towards increased racist populism in Europe, notably France.

We have chosen two texts from 2020.

* consultant, member of Mapinduzi

Our colleague Andrea Böhm, a journalist with the weekly newspaper "Die Zeit", probes the roots of this racism and forces us to take a courageous look at our common history of colonialism.

We then took the example of the witch-hunt against Achille Mbembe from Cameroon, who has been accused of antisemitism by certain circles in Germany. His "Letter to the Germans" published in the daily newspaper "taz" (Die Tageszeitung) masterfully develops the evolution of his ideas and demonstrates once more their universal reach beyond individual origins.

Our second theme is the alarming situation in the **countries of the Sahel**, which is impoverishing the populations and making them insecure and risks setting the whole region ablaze. Armed conflicts are on the rise and the local scene is often dominated by the crimes of jihadist groups, but also by state armies unleashing violence against their own citizens.

But how did this situation arise?

Isaac Dakono of the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA) in Mali analyses the failures of the states in this region as the root of today's problems, the electoralist democracies that are mere repressive facades, and stresses the need for a grassroots organization at the service of the people.

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan of social science research laboratory LASDEL in Niger, writes along the same lines, stressing the need to rely on clearly existing skills present in the local context and explaining how the "aid" from Western donors can hinder such an evolution, particularly in local government. He expounds on ways to "rely on one's own strength" to stabilise these countries in crisis.

The Sahel Committee of the Association of Africanists in Germany (VAD) seems to agree with the quote with which de Sardan introduces his text: "*We encourage aid that can help us to manage without aid. But in general the aid and assistance policies merely led us to become completely disorganized, to enslave ourselves, to shirk our responsibility in our economic, political and cultural areas*" – Thomas Sankara, speech to the UN on 4 October 1984 at the UN General Assembly. In a position paper of January 2022, the Sahel Committee urges European decision-makers, especially Germans, to reverse their perspective on cooperation with the Sahel countries and start from the local level and from civil society initiatives in the broadest sense of the term.

Finally, in a second article, Olivier de Sardan analyses the many reasons why France is rejected in the Sahel and proposes to draw some conclusions.

A third theme is the **Covid-19 pandemic** and its impact on African populations.

Flaubert Djateng of Zenü Network shares the experiences of his network in Cameroon and the tactics of the people in relation to the danger of the pandemic, the development of local medicines, but also their deep distrust of decision makers.

Jean-Pierre Lindiro Kabirigi from the DRC analyses the changes that have taken place as a result of the pandemic and talks about the conspiracy theories that are flourishing and the "business" that has sprung up around the pandemic.

Colleagues from Pole Institute in Goma, including senior researcher and coordinator Nene Morisho, elaborate on the effects of and reactions to the pandemic in DR Congo in several articles in their publication "Regards Croisés". Here, again, the failings of the Congolese state are highlighted.

A scientific analysis of the central role of community initiatives in the fight against Covid in Freetown comes to us from Sierra Leone.

Finally, we share with you the WATHI think tank's excellent summary reports on the political and economic effects of the pandemic on West African countries.

We have not yet been able to include analyses and opinions on the fallout from Putin's war on Ukraine, which – for once – the European people are experiencing as a direct threat to their security, their values and their ways of life.

This already visibly marginalises – in Western opinions and decisions - the conflicts in other regions of the world, especially the Sahel and beyond the whole of West Africa, but it also marginalises the ongoing conflicts in the DRC and the continuing unrest in the English-speaking part of Cameroon.

The war in Ukraine is the cause of shortages, especially wheat and oil, that could well lead to serious human disasters in Africa. Already prices are rising inexorably.

On the other hand, Russian propaganda, conveyed among others by the Wagner group whose activities go far beyond the mere mercenary, seems to have a large social media following in Africa. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" is a saying that leads Africans – disgusted, and rightly so, by the policies

implemented in their countries by France in particular, but also by other European countries and the United States, and by the leaders maintained through these policies – to sympathise with, and even support, Putin's inhumane and criminal actions, which are likely to take a hefty toll on the people not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia.

A war on European soil in the 21st century seemed impossible, but it is here and has repercussions far beyond Europe.

The values linked to just as well as durable peace and democratic governance are not only defended in Europe. Africa has a leading role to play in this and its younger generations must be involved in the dialogue concerning the world of tomorrow. Unfortunately, there are very few mechanisms in place to create opportunities for young people.

Mapinduzi will organise a conference on the situation in the countries of the Sahel and on the effects of the war in Ukraine to discuss and exchange views on these key issues.

In the meantime, we hope that the articles we have chosen to present to you will stimulate fruitful dialogue on the world that is changing all around us.

Tribute to Ambroise

"When you are young you don't die, you lose your life"

In the midst of his prime, in the firmament of glory, Ambroise Dakouo was torn from the affection of his family, who are still inconsolable.

About the man and his journey,

He was born in the 1980s, precisely on December 7, 1982, in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. From a modest family, then, his father Etienne was a contractor in the building sector, and his mother Assetou Sabine Dakouo, a housewife. From birth he was a true twin for Nicola, his younger brother. He was the first born of a family of three children. He and his twin brother and their younger sister Jeanette.

In his early childhood, he grasped life to the full, in the streets of Asini by the sea and the Ebriés lagoon, a village that attracts a large human population because of the beach and the hotel infrastructure. Very early on, he was aware of the plural and implacable dimension of human existence. He was then fashioned by the realities of life that surrounded him and that summoned him to a rude awakening.

At the age of 8 he returned to his home country, Mali, to continue his elementary education. First in his village of Mandiakyui among his community, the Bwa, through whom he identified himself for the rest of his life. This village is an administrative district of the Tominian circle. He then went to Bougouni to live with his aunt for his secondary studies, after obtaining his Diploma of Fundamental Studies (DEF). After his baccalaureate, he enrolled at the University of Bamako, in the Faculty of Letters, Languages and Human Sciences (FLASH), in Sociology, from which he graduated in 2007 with a Master's degree in Sociology and Anthropology. In 2006, he joined the Centre for Political and Institutional Expertise in Africa (CEPIA), where he did an internship as part of the preparation of his end-of-study thesis. He ended up staying and making

his way in the same dynamic, with the creation in 2008 of the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA-Mali), which he eventually led as national coordinator until he was called back to the Lord.

Interview with Dr Ousmane SY President of the Regional Council of ARGA

"I first met Ambroise in 2006, when he came as an intern to the Centre for Political and Institutional Expertise in Africa (CEPIA), which was headed by myself at the time. He started from nothing to become the symbol, the reference of a responsible and committed youth. He had a thirst for knowledge and above all intellectual curiosity in all fields. Ambroise was open, committed with unimaginable complicity, self-taught, and was deeply involved in training and recruiting young people.

He had become the icon and symbol of ARGA-MAli, so his death was a great loss to me and to the entire scientific community. Ambrose was a pillar, a visionary, with an indescribable personality. I am really affected by his passing."

During his lifetime, he was the symbol of a dynamic and devoted youth. His family, friends and colleagues all remember him as a brilliant, brave and generous young man.

He was brilliant because he had a real thirst for knowledge, his collection of degrees and intellectual output speak for themselves. The thing he always put first in his life was to learn, learn, and learn. He liked to say: "the only combat worth fighting is that of excellence"; "We must leave our comfort zones to achieve great things"; "The road is long, the path is rocky, but we will get there, and victory is certain" said his friend Isaac Dakono, in his memory.

"Ambroise and I met at university. Then our relations grew stronger on a professional level at ARGA-MALI. He was a hard worker, with a passion for books. Ambroise was a true scholar, an Educator, gallant, brilliant, generous, modest and very calm. He was one of a kind, forthright and natural. His death annihilated our married life. Even today I am unable to touch his personal documents. I am afflicted on all sides because I have lost a loved one, my Friend, my Confidant, my advisor and my husband".

Interview with his wife, Mrs Nana Alassane Toure

He was courageous, despite the great challenges he alone faced, he was able to make his way in the face of inexorable adversity. He conquered and overcame the fear of moving forward with his own initiatives. In doing so, he contributed to the training of young people in Mali through a number of programmes and also through his writings. He never missed an opportunity to lend a hand for a good cause. In this respect, he is remembered as a symbol.

He was generous in sharing his knowledge, he loved forums for dialogue where he put forward his ideas with finesse and no clichés. Like a spring running to its confluence, he always contributed where he was needed. He was a philosopher and often said "we are in the world but we are not of this world".

"Ambrose was a credible, humble, wise man with a strong sense of honour. Always smiling, Ambroise had immeasurable qualities, devoted at work and ready to serve anywhere if needed. His death was a tragedy for me and especially for the whole scientific community. As the saying goes, when you decide to come, you must be ready to leave."
Sorry Coulibaly former Head of the Documentation and Public Debate Department at the Djoliba Centre and friend of the deceased

These words and testimonies adequately illustrate what he was, and his loss is undoubtedly one of the most painful for his family, friends and colleagues.

From his academic background,

He completed a number of university courses

- 2003–2007: Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Bamako, Mali.
- 2009–2011: Master II in decentralisation and local development engineering (IUDT), at the University Institute of Territorial Development, Bamako/Mali;
- June and July 2012: 3-month internship at the National School of Administration (ENA Paris-France)
- 2013–2014: Master II at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHED), DPP (Development and Policy Practice) in Geneva, Switzerland;
- 2012–2015: DEA (Diplôme d'Études Approfondies) at the Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée (ISFRA) in Mali;

- 2014–2016: Master II at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations (IRIS), Paris, France;
- 2018: Thesis preparation at the Institut Supérieur de Formation et de Recherche Appliquée (ISFRA) in Mali;

From his bibliography,

He published a number of books and articles:

Books:

- Gouvernance participative et Pratique de la démocratie au MALI, published by Harmattan in May 2013 with Dr Modibo Keita, co-author;
- Study of the Security Sector in Mali: Analysis and compilation of texts applicable to security sector reform (SSR) in collaboration with Dr Seydou Doumbia (2016)
- Rethinking Governance in Mali, October 2014, Compiled from the results of the multi-stakeholder forum on governance in Mali, editorial member,

Articles, policy briefs and analytical notes:

- Local conflict resolution mechanisms in the face of the implementation of security sector reform in Mali (2017);
- What kind of governance for sound and fair reparation for victims (2017);
- National dialogue in Mali: Lessons from the 1991 conference for the end of the crisis in Mali in 2016;
- Inter-community dialogue practices for peace and reconciliation in Mali: Experiences and analysis (2016);
- On the impertinence of political and institutional reforms in favour of young people in Mali;
- Malian youth in the context of the state crisis: Social markers and political-institutional constructions;
- State and failure in governance;
- The main principles and post-conflict initiatives within local authorities in Mali;
- Perspectives on Security Sector Reform in Mali: Actors, strategies and governance issues;
- Mapping, structure and actors of local governance in Timbuktu;

- Local, displaced and refugee communities: challenges and opportunities for reconciliation and community reintegration;
- Governance issues and the rebuilding of the post-crisis 2012 state in Mali;
- Youth and the reinvention of post-crisis governance in Mali;
- Democratic governance and decentralisation in Mali: Concepts, challenges and strategies;
- Local democracy and factors of ungovernability in Mali;
- Decentralisation as a factor of development and social cohesion;
- The conquest of power in Mali by young people in the aftermath of the March 22, 2012 coup d'état: Ideology of the political alternative and strategies.

Without saying goodbye, and without any other formality, Ambroise left us on the evening of 22 October 2018 following a road traffic accident on the RN6, 40 km from Ségou (the fourth administrative region of Mali). He left in the prime of his life with these projects, his heart full of energy, and his mission accomplished.

Who would have thought? but it is the cruel fate of life "Everything will return to dust". There is so much to say about the man, who was able to awaken minds, mark his time and influence his generation.

It is said, and we dare to believe and hope, that "death is a new birth in a mysterious paradise that no one really knows, a paradise where the dead live, the dead who are happy to see their loved ones lead their lives on earth with joy and in the full awareness of the happiness of living".

Dear Ambroise, you have left behind a widow, two children (a boy and a girl), friends, and inconsolable collaborators who hope and keep faith. You remain a part of them because "To die is not to die; to die is not to disappear; to die on earth is to be reborn in a more beautiful world, a better world".

We pay tribute to you, great warrior of freedom, for a faraway felicity and a new city, into which we are not sure to enter.

May Allah in His mercy welcome you into His paradise
REST IN PEACE AMBROISE DAKOUO

Racism in Europe: we, the eternal racists

An essay

Andrea Böhm*

Europe could not have become the powerhouse it is without colonial exploitation and slavery. We cannot fight racism unless we confront history. This is what we will do now.

We, the eternal racists

Let us start with a little experiment for all our white readers. Say the following sentence out loud: "We are racist." Once again: "We are racist." Is there something that bothers you? Me too. What does it mean, we are tolerant citizens, we are appalled by the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in the USA. We abhor all those who attack or insult human beings of another colour of skin or origin - anywhere. The problem is the following: this is not enough.

The phrase "We are racist" should not be understood as a self-accusation, but rather as a simple statement of fact. We are steeped in racism through countless images and stories we have been fed since childhood. In history lessons, films, commercials, TV news, newspapers. I'm not talking about old books or articles in which Blacks are still referred to as niggers, or about the blockbuster films of the economic miracle, such as Toxi, about "bi-racial" children, so cute but annoying. I am talking about our image of the world and our image of ourselves as enlightened Europeans, aware of our past.

*Author and journalist for the German weekly newspaper "Die Zeit".

We don't overcome racism by minutes of silence in honour of its victims or by toppling statues – however important and justified such actions may be. Such an ideology can only truly be fought when one is willing to understand its historical dimension. This is something we have not yet done seriously in Germany or in Europe.

This is all the more surprising given that historical awareness is considered a primary national and European virtue. As a pillar of a democratic Germany after the Nazi era and the Shoah. As the foundation of reconciliation after two world wars and, thus, of the European Union. This virtue, however, stops at our shores. Europe's past beyond the Mediterranean and the Atlantic is hidden behind a veil of repression and distortion of history. Why? Because the history of racism is also the history of colonialism, and therefore of our prosperity. Talking about the roots of racism goes to the heart of the matter. But perhaps that is precisely what is now becoming possible – spurred on by a whole series of developments that at first glance have nothing to do with each other, spurred on by our reactions to the murder of the black man George Floyd by a police officer. For some of us, such a controversy about the origins of our privileges seems like a threat in already threatening times, to say the least. In truth, it is an opportunity.

Scene from the German colony of German East Africa (now Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and part of Mozambique), circa 1910. © Haeckel Brothers/Paul Thompson/FPG/Hulton Archive/Getty Images

"The others over there"

In Europe, it is a matter of overcoming two lies about living in society. The first is specifically German: we have already contributed enough to treating past crimes with the "culture of remembrance" of the Holocaust and the Nazi dictatorship - and we were not really involved in colonisation anyway. The people living in the former German "protectorates" see things differently. In Cameroon, Togo, Tanzania and especially Namibia, where the Ovaherero and Nama peoples, "inferior races" according to colonial ideology, were victims of the first German genocide at the beginning of the twentieth century. This German lie is intimately embedded in another, European one, that colonialism was indeed a brutal affair, but so long ago. In addition, the "others over there" in Africa, Asia and Latin America benefited from railways, schools and education to become nation states. In other words, access to modernity. Or, in Britain's case, as Boris Johnson puts it: the "blessing of the British Empire", which could be considered an impressive feat in repression, as historians and journalists have for decades been revealing the extent of the violence and exploitation involved in colonialism. The Open Veins of Latin America, the classic work of the Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano, dates from 1971, while Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, about the consequences of European plunder in Africa, was published in 1961. The crime against humanity represented by the slave trade has been documented in detail, even if it is far from exhaustive, as have the atrocities committed by British, Italian, German, Belgian and Dutch colonial administrations.

"The baptismal font of our modern age"

But for a long time this knowledge remained stuck in the niche of postcolonial studies, it was overshadowed by the ideological conflicts of the Cold War and, once these were over, by the hubris of the supposed victory of the (white) West. It was only the recent debates about Europe's museums – in Germany, notably around the Humboldt Forum – that struck a historical chord for the first time on this side of the Atlantic. It took some time to admit that our museums were full of pieces stolen from the former colonies. However, this now forces us,

whether we like it or not, to ask ourselves what else Europe has stolen from its colonies, apart from masks, spears, statues and human skulls. The answer: from a material point of view, almost everything that was necessary for its development, and thus for the emergence of the white western European era. Rubber, gold, silver, copper, ivory, cotton and sugar. And millions of slaves.

As I said, knowledge on the subject has long been available with a few clicks. But it is still not part of our European narrative, which should be that our technical and intellectual achievements – be it industrialisation or the Enlightenment – would not have been possible without the plundering of the colonies, without the death and enslavement of millions. Racism as an ideology is not a variety of group hatred, which has always existed in the world. It was developed in accordance with the European raid on the colonies. A project of the eighteenth-century white elite in which biologists, physicians, philosophers and ideologists attempted to pseudo-scientifically and morally underpin the hierarchisation of men into "superiors and inferiors". And thus also the rise of Europe and the West as a "civilising" power. The Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe once described the slave trade and the plantation economy as the "baptismal font of our modern era". Acknowledging this is the first step in examining contemporary racism in depth.

Perhaps we are just about to do so. In Germany and in Europe. It is high time to remove the word "race" from Basic Law, to remove the bronze statues of slave traders and to rename the streets and buildings that are still named after German "heroes" of the African colonies. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, Adolph Woermann, Adolf Lüderitz. However, they must not disappear from our collective memory. On the contrary: they are elements of a common history of Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America. This also requires a new vision of our historical icons. "Humanity has achieved its greatest perfection in the white race. [...] The Negroes stand far lower [...]." This sentence is from Immanuel Kant, the philosopher of the Enlightenment, but also a representative of the European ideology of racism. One does not exclude the other.

It is not enough to switch television channels

A number of things begin to waver if we take this political archaeology seriously. Not only our boundless veneration of European thinkers, but also our persistent narrative, dating back to Kant's time, of an Africa as a faceless continent, alternately lost without white help or better off without Africans. Today, we are still being served images of black children being fed and cuddled by white aid workers, while black adults stand helplessly by. And if the question actually comes up now: yes, the infantilization of entire societies and one's own exaltation as a white saviour, no matter how well-intentioned, is a racist stereotype. The same applies to the cliché of Africa as an "untouched wilderness" with as many lions as possible and as few Africans as possible, as still reproduced in television series and nature documentaries today. Many of Africa's spectacular national parks can be traced back to the colonial practice (also by the Germans) of forcibly depopulating entire swathes of land and declaring them "nature reserves and hunting grounds" – for the white masters only, of course. This is the minimum you need to know before booking the next safari in post-Corona times.

A sincere confrontation with colonialism and racism does not just mean switching to another channel; it means asking the question of compensation and reparations.

The Ovaherero and Nama are making claims, as are survivors of British torture camps in colonial Kenya and relatives of victims of Dutch massacres in Indonesia. In recent years, some of them have been promised money – usually shamefully low sums that would be obtained in a lawsuit for compensation in Europe for a broken nose. But the African and Asian plaintiffs were simply happy that these crimes were recognised in law.

As soon as the word "compensation" appears in the debates on colonial crimes and material exploitation, the former colonial powers are quick to retaliate: Why? We have been transferring money as humanitarian aid to "them in the south" for decades. The federal government has also consistently argued against the demands of the Ovaherero and Nama. This is an old defensive reflex that works less and less well, however, as representatives of the global South become involved in debates about shared history, the common history of colonialism.

We are still benefiting from the colonial legacy

To claim that Africans, for example, use colonialism as an excuse to divert attention from their own failures after independence is an extremely white presumption. In almost every country of the Global South, social movements against corruption, impoverishment and authoritarianism were and are active. For intellectuals and activists alike – from textile workers' unions in Bangladesh to farmers' cooperatives in Bolivia to journalists' associations in Mali – it is not a question of presenting the rich countries with a huge final bill for colonialism. They are primarily concerned with a new distribution of the costs of our prosperity.

Indeed, all the anti-colonial liberation struggles, all the toppling of monuments and all the laws against discrimination have not changed one thing: for 500 years, Europe and North America have been outsourcing the costs of their prosperity. China and other Asian countries have long since joined our club, but this does not change the fact that we are still profiting from this colonial legacy today. The social and ecological costs of our food (whether labelled organic or not), our affordable clothing, our cheap electronic devices and their disposal are still paid for by "the others" – people in the global south. In his book, Next to Us the Deluge, sociologist Stephan Lessenich coined the term "externalisation society", by which he does not only refer to the brutal exploitation of Asian seamstresses, whose jeans end up in German bargain counters for €29.99. By externalisation, he also refers to our collective capacity to suppress these relationships and the misery they engender. This is no longer so straightforward since, with the climate crisis, the bill for our way of life has been presented to us for the first time. This crisis does not redress the balance of power, but rather accentuates the imbalance of power that was established a few centuries ago. The regions of the world that were the most severely bled for Europe and America's rise are now paying double or even triple again in the climate crisis: with incomparably worse consequences of global warming as a result of a fossil fuel boom from which they have benefited the least.

Farewell to white domination

These data can also be accessed with a few clicks. The question remains whether and to what extent we are prepared to let our self-image and our worldview be shaken in the best sense of the word. For we have by no means given up on the classification of human lives. Of course, we no longer talk about "races", "inferior" or "superior". But we consciously or unconsciously think in categories such as "valuable", "less valuable" and "dispensable". The darker the skin, the lower the classification, the more acceptable the lowest wages, the higher rates of illness, the shortest life expectancy, the loss of land, fields and water. This, too, is part of the legacy of colonial racism in the 2020s.

The debates and struggles that have now been given a new, enormous impetus here as well, by the racist police violence in the USA are exhausting, bitter, unsettling and often ugly. Especially since we, Europeans and Americans, are no longer setting the pace and the direction. Our era is often described as the end of the Western era. In fact, we are in the midst of the "long farewell to white dominance", as writer Charlotte Wiedemann describes it in her latest book of the same name. We can resist this with violence, which some of us are already doing and which more will probably do in the near future. But there is one thing we can no longer prevent: others from challenging our status and all the privileges we have taken for granted up till now.

What about Immanuel Kant now? Some time ago, Achille Mbembe wrote in Die Zeit that there were three different Kants: the Kant who recognised man as a being with sovereign reason, the Kant of Towards Perpetual Peace, "who opened up a horizon for humanity as a world society towards which we must journey together". And the Kant who remained stuck in his European and German prejudices and who betrayed universalism. Humanity could not do without the first two, says Mbembe. Especially in the current period.

Source: Die Zeit https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2020-06/rassismus-in-europa-kolonien-geschichte-verdraengung-sklaverei/komplettansicht

Letter to the German people

Achille Mbembe*

I really do not have the impression that I am on trial in Germany. For anyone who is interested in a constructive discussion of the body of my work, only a part of which has been translated into German, I would like to provide some keys here to ease interpretation.

Understanding the genealogy of a work and any possible contradictions requires knowledge of the context in which it came into the world and grew – the major issues it addresses and the idiom in which it is composed; the major polemics it is a part of and the main turning points. This applies to any intellectual product, irrespective of geographic provenance or language of expression.

For anyone truly seeking to grasp the sense of my endeavours or the contents of my reflection with a view to intercultural dialogue, interrogations are of no use whatsoever. In an era of scapegoats, excommunications and denunciations, I hope these keys will help open the way for a rational discussion of the major moral and political concerns that some among us disagree on.

My intellectual practice can be defined as continuous wandering or, rather, as an endless journey from one shoreline to another. This is what I call "crossing". It entails leaving behind the comfort of what we know and deliberately confronting what could threaten our certainties. In this context, thinking involves taking risks, including the risk of being misunderstood or misinterpreted. This state of mind is perhaps the purview of those who were born in one place, and left their homeland at an early age never to return to the fold.

I was born in Cameroon, where I received a double legacy. The first as a result of my education in excellent Christian schools. Not only was I exposed to clas-

* Cameroonian philosopher and writer based in South Africa.

sical European culture, but my imagination was nourished from a very early age by the Catholic church, its dogma, catechism and mythologies.

This perhaps explains why Christianity as such later became one of my main subjects of study. Having understood this system as a regime of truth, we could say that from the beginning of my intellectual career I embarked on a critique of the Absolute.

Theologies of the Absolute are not the exclusive preserve of the Churches. They are also the domain of the lay powers. This was the case of the State in our lands. The State, in its colonial form or in the form of postcolonial tyrannies, quickly became the preferential subject of my work.

The second legacy was one I received from my grand-mother, an illiterate country woman who joined the fight against colonialism and lost her only son in the process, assassinated by the French army on 13 September 1958. She introduced me to the ideas of anti-colonialism and forgotten memories, especially the memories of the vanquished of history.

For, precisely, irrespective of the angle we examine them under, the peoples of Africa are among history's defeated. How can a historical community overcome the idea of defeat and learn to be triumphant again? This is a question I have been pondering since childhood.

It so happens that of all the territories under French colonial domination in Sub-Saharan Africa, Cameroon was the only one where the struggle for independence ended in armed conflict. The nationalist movement, which had led the resistance, was defeated by the military. Those who took power after independence made use of the State systems to do everything possible to wipe out the memory of that resistance.

The first academic papers I penned covered precisely this attempt to manufacture amnesia.

This experience of erasure of the memory of the defeated played a major role in my reflections on the politics of remembrance and on my analyses of the post-colonial State and contemporary figures of tyranny. Only gradually did I come to understand that this was not specific to African politics.

I should add that it was also my grandmother who introduced me to Bible readings. As a teenager, I found in the bible an extraordinary world that little by little became familiar to me. From an early age, the biblical narrative became closely associated with the anti-colonialist narrative in my mind, to the extent

that I became more attached to the Bible and the figures in it than to the Church and its dogmas; more attached to the forgotten memory of the defeated than to the theology of the State that purports to hold a monopoly of the truth.

And so at the heart of my approach there is a *soupçon* of rebellion, which is tempered by a utopian fibre. The people who are persecuting me today do not know that I found this utopian fibre, based on the idea of the radical refusal of established facts and power struggles, in certain traditions of Jewish thought. When I left Cameroon to study at a French university, I already had in my mind the major themes that would orient my intellectual project in the years between 1980–2000.

The first was related to a political critique of Christianity. Much more than an institution endowed with a centralised power, I had arrived at a conception of Christianism as a dream and a vision at the same time.

I wanted to find out what would remain of the dream if it were stripped of its dogma expressions. Is the Church with its hierarchies the expression, in the last instance, of the community? Or can we imagine communities whose first task is not the exercise of power, but sharing, service towards and care of the smallest among us?

Beyond the Church, I wanted to reflect on the possibility of sharing, common ground, of communities founded not on faith and kinship but on reason and community spirit. Not on the idea of the unique, but of the many. Not on the absolutisation of the memory of suffering and defeat, even provisional (martyrdom), but on the anticipation of the resurrection, that is to say hope for another way of life, never accomplished because always preceding us.

Careful readers of *Afriques indociles* (Paris, Editions Karthala, 1988) know that this is a key moment in this enquiry. To write this book, I was forced to pay as much attention as possible to the history of monotheisms.

I was compelled to look at the extent to which, in our African context, monotheism is defined not in opposition to polytheism, as in Greece, but in opposition to what has been called animism.

In the continuation of this set of problem issues I spent much time studying African pre-colonial thought systems; in gaining an idea of the way in which, for us Africans, the cosmos and the whole universe are an integral part of the life forces.

It is difficult to grasp the meaning of anything I say or write without the

knowledge that my discourse originates in African metaphysics of the living, in African conceptions of the life force, the circulation of worlds and the metamorphosis of spirits. A very large part of my intellectual exploration takes root precisely in these systems in which the principle of the many prevails over that of the One.

The work on the memory of the defeated or on the politics of remembrance became *La naissance du maquis dans le Sud-Cameroun* (Paris, Karthala, 1996). The critique of State tyranny led to *On the Postcolony (University of California Press, 2001)*. This work, by the way, does not make me a postcolonial thinker, as many commentators in the press have asserted.

I moved to South Africa in 2001. While based there, for many years I spent part of my time teaching in the United States. At the same time, I kept strong ties with and travelled frequently to France, where all my works are published.

Between 2001 and 2010, the life I was living in South Africa and the way things were going in the world pushed me to go into more depth on the theme of memory, no longer from the angle of amnesia and defeat, but from the point of view of identities suffering in their relation to ethics and freedom. This led me to closely examine two cases: the experience of African-Americans in the United States and the history of racial segregation in South Africa.

Faced with these two extremely differing paths, it was a question of re-investigating the concept of black identity *(blackness)*, to stop using it as the supreme paradigm for difference, or exclusion. On the other hand, I wanted to revisit the thought traditions of Africa and the diaspora which insist on resemblance, similarity and openness towards the vast world. I wanted to identify what it was, in the experience of the modern world, that constituted the universal nature of the negro condition.

By making racial identities relative, refusing to make them essential and turning my back on the ideologies of difference, I was trying to develop a theory of what I call "the in-common". This work was expressed in two books, *Sortir de la grande nuit* (Paris, La Découverte, 2010) and *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris, La Découverte, 2013). (English translation: *Critique of black reason, Wits University Press, 2017)*. These works, and all those that followed, end in a plea for hope and reparation.

Since then, my thinking has focused resolutely on the conditions for the emergence of a shared world in the present context, marked as it is by the es-

calation of technology, climate change and the slow combustion of the planet. In *Critique of black reason*, when I speak of "the universalisation of the negro condition", it is to turn away from identity politics, one of the contemporary sources of enmity. Theories of difference and identity were once used as leverage in the struggle for equality and justice. This is no longer the case. Today, they have been annexed by the forces of conservatism and instrumentalised for absolute division.

Given these circumstances, it is imperative to resume the investigation, with a new impetus and renewed vigour, encompassing all the archives in the world, of the possibilities of a humanity that is in harmony with all forms of life. This return to the idea of a "human race", I strive to integrate it into the idea of the living in general, in an effort that incorporates the inseparable other component - the biosphere. This is the sole aim of the entire critique of enmity to be found in *Politiques de l'inimitié* and in other recent texts.

Those who are persecuting me today for no valid reason, and who owe me a public apology, claim to have found, in a paper I wrote upon my return from a trip to Israel in 1992, the proof that Israel was the starting point of my reflections.

In so doing, they are not even aware of their racist and paternalistic attitude. The truth is that I am trying to develop an idea of the crossing – the crossing of the oceans, of borders, of identities and the defetichising of roots. It is possible, after all, that this is their point of contention, as they are convinced that this is a time for borders and fortifications.

In the West there has been a long tradition of travel stories. A travel story is not a treatise on history or sociology. Very often, they are anecdotal, intended as a useful device for those who want to question themselves or to call themselves into question.

European literature is full of this type of text in which the traveller evokes Africa, China, Persia or other areas of the world. The purpose of this sort of prose is not to recount who the Africans, the Chinese or the Iranians really are.

It is to act as a magnifying mirror, usually a distorting one, that they hold up to themselves to try to reassure themselves about what they actually are, or to boost the feeling of what they believe they are.

In my 1992 paper, I recount in a very furtive, even naive and romanticised

way, using sometimes hyperbolic and occasionally even poetic language, my impressions of my recent trip to Israel for a seminar.

Here and there, I deliberately adopt the attitude of a child in a state of awe, in order to suggest to the Cameroonian reader the sense of wonder and dream-like quality of what I'm talking about. In this way, I try to refer the reader to that time in my childhood when I had to read excerpts from the bible to my grandmother, who had never learnt to read.

For in fact, through the Bible which we did not choose, Israel burst into our imagination and became anchored there. In the same way as all the elements of culture that came to us with colonisation, we made room for it in our imagination, that of the Christians in particular. All those who took the trouble to observe our societies and study our culture can bear witness to one thing. This hospitality was never faked.

The questions that preoccupied me at the time were the following. What does it mean to live in the myths and traditions of someone else? What happens when we realise that these myths and dreams, which we held as true, were merely legend? Do we reject them as a block, or do we accept them in the hope that they will steer existence in a way that will be productive of life?

All colonised people ask themselves these questions. They are not abstract. They condition existence. In the intellectual traditions I am a part of, they have held the attention of each generation. For as far as we are concerned, our legacies have often been forced on us. Often, they are not chosen. This is the case in particular regarding religion, language and State.

Under these conditions, part of the work of analysis carried out by thinkers from formerly colonised countries has consisted in organising this critique, often groping around in the dark, for there are no definitive answers. Just as there are no final questions. The questions must be continuously reformulated. And it is accepted that a certain amount of error and approximation may arise from this act of reformulating the questions.

This is what South Africa taught me. For the remainder, Israel is among the myths we inherited. For some of us, it became an indispensable myth. How could we live it knowingly, not as a dogma, while at the same time seeking to detach ourselves from all the philosophies of the Absolute? These are the questions shared with the readers in my notes upon my return from my trip to Israel. They are not about the real nature of Israel, but about the myth we inherited,

the part of this myth that might still serve to guide us, and this other part that we do not need anymore.

Ultimately I think our world is divided into two. On the one hand there are those who, like me, are convinced that we are merely passing through, wanderers who know that wandering means seeking amidst uncertainty and the unknown. On the other hand are those who believe they hold ready-made truths, and try to impose them on everyone, with no regard to diversity of experience or situation. The chasm between the two never ceases to widen.

We are still faced today with the question of whether the suffering of a people belongs to that people exclusively, to the extent that no-one else has the right to refer to it. Is there any possibility at all of sharing all the memories of the world and under what conditions? These questions, I found them once I arrived in South Africa at the beginning of the 2000s, along with those of pardon, reparation and reconciliation. They have remained with me.

To end, must I repeat that I am not German? I have no ambition to live or to work in Germany. With respect to the major moral and political issues of our time, it is not up to me to tell Germany how it should behave in a pluralistic world where many different peoples still aspire to freedom.

The only thing I can contribute to this debate is one voice among others, a voice from afar, from those regions of the world which we mistakenly believe have nothing to say and should allow other people to tell them what to think.

It is up to Germany to decide whether or not it wants to listen to these voices from elsewhere or, turning its back on our deepest aspirations, to dictate to us even what our conscience should be.

Germany has no need for foreign scapegoats to face its multiple malaises. A certain part of Germany, which in any case seems to be hostile to me out of principle, does not have the right to take my discourse hostage.

The sooner it allows my ideas to express themselves freely in their own name, in their own idiom and in the multiplicity of languages and accents, the better it will be for all of us.

Source: Die Tageszeitung (taz), www.taz.de

“Relying on your own strength”

Faced with aid dependency, promoting contextual experts in public policy in Africa

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan*

“Expert” is a term that usually connotes a professional specialisation, and, more particularly in the field of development, a recognised skill in technical or social engineering. Here we want to extend it to a completely different form of competence.

In Africa, the lack of understanding of the local context in which standardised development projects and programmes operate (“travelling models”), and the failure to take into account the unexpected effects of the reactions of local actors, are structural features of the institutional development sector, which are the root cause of its recurrent failures. The sector has no shortage of international (or sometimes national) experts in the conventional sense of the term, but it never makes use of the skills of those most familiar with the local contexts in which external interventions are “tested”; in other words it ignores the existence of “contextual expertise”, which would be indispensable if we wanted to design and implement interventions and public policies actually in phase with the “real world”, that of African neighbourhoods and villages, which is unknown in the offices in Washington, Geneva or Paris (and often also by those in Dakar, Bamako or Cotonou).

Although not recognised as such, there are two sorts of contextual experts. The majority are operational contextual experts, in other words, actors on the ground, working in contact with users in state services or in the many projects

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or NGOs: they are familiar with the practical norms of civil servants and the social norms of the populations, above all from the inside; but they also have a critical outlook on the routines of daily life and a capacity for initiatives and innovations anchored in the realities on the ground (they are reformers from the inside, and we met some of them in our surveys). Others are indirect contextual experts, i.e. researchers, whose professional activity consists of describing, understanding and analysing local contexts (and their reactions to external interventions), mainly through qualitative methods involving long-term insertion; they are well placed to identify operational contextual experts.

Both sides observe daily how interventions that have been designed, funded and piloted by development institutions (the external reformers) are disconnected from the practices and perceptions of the actors directly concerned, while at the same time reproducing a dangerous addiction to international aid.

In the article, we will discuss in more detail the concept of contextual expert, its specificity in relation to similar notions, and how mobilising contextual expertise could improve the quality of services that development institutions and public policies deliver to the population.

"*We encourage aid that can help us to manage without aid. But in general the aid and assistance policies merely led us to become completely disorganized, to enslave ourselves, to shirk our responsibility in our economic, political and cultural areas*" – Thomas Sankara, speech to the UN on 4 October 1984 at the UN General Assembly, quoted in Borrel et al. 2021, p. 757.

Introduction

It is perilous to speak of Africa in general, and precautions, such as "the Africas" (Darbon, 2001) are necessary[1]. Each country has its own specificities, and within each country there are many disparities. Nevertheless, if one broadens the perspective to a global comparative level, some common lines emerge, which concern most of the continent. Dependency on aid (both development and humanitarian aid) is thus a widely shared characteristic of the African

1 I am grateful to Jean-François Lantéri, Philippe Lavigne Delville, Abdoulaye Mohamadou, Louis Pizarro, Abdoulaye Sounaye, and Mohamadou Tarka for their suggestions based on an earlier draft of this text.

continent. Of course, it is not the only contender: there is, for example, a painful colonial past that has left various legacies, or a predatory culture of post-colonial elites, analysed in detail by many social science studies. It seems to us that aid dependency, although often emphasised – see for example Bayart (1999), who puts extroversion into historical perspective – has been little explored in one particular, yet central, area, namely the process of state-building. Among the rare exceptions, Bierschenk (2009) shows how the transition from a despotic to a democratic regime in Benin in 1989 did not reduce the country's dependence on aid: beyond the changes in the political system and forms of power, the same negative consequences were found in terms of governance (corruption, patronage, favouritism, authoritarianism and regionalism). His analysis is basically just as valid for the other French-speaking countries of Africa (and no doubt a number of English-speaking countries too), despite their different political histories since independence. More fundamentally, beyond the regimes that succeed one another between elections and coups, the functioning of public services and the drafting and implementation of public policies are deeply and durably affected by aid dependency.

We will describe how external aid weighs heavily on public policies, and how it generates many unexpected effects, due to the fact that these "external reformers" have virtually no knowledge of the local contexts.

These unexpected effects include many negative ones, including the one we will focus on here: a general loss of initiative within the public service, which is a direct result of aid dependency. There are exceptions among government officials, and here and there one meets "reformers from within", who know the local contexts and want to change them in a realistic way. We will attempt to define this "contextual expertise" and analyse the role it can play, from a perspective that aims to propose new avenues of research for the social sciences in Africa, and renew the old and almost forgotten strategy of "relying on one's own strengths".

Aid is everywhere

Much of the public policy implemented in Africa is dependent on external aid. Education, the health system, the justice system, the police, or the armed forces

are in dire need of the resources it provides to function as best they can. When it comes to fighting an epidemic, dealing with a food crisis, or responding to terrorism, the support of donors and their institutions is indispensable. For example, veritable humanitarian and medical armadas arrived during the 2005 "famine" in Niger (Olivier de Sardan, 2008a) or the recent Ebola epidemic in Guinea (Gomez-Temesio and Le Marcis, 2017). In addition to the countless European or North American (and now also Arab-Islamic) NGOs that criss-cross the cities and villages of the entire continent on a daily basis, in addition to the various bilateral cooperations that showcase their assistance geopolitics (from former colonial powers to newcomers such as China, Russia, India or Turkey, and the inevitable American presence), the World Bank, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, WFP and UNDP instigate, in each African country, a very high proportion of the administrative reforms, health protocols, educational programmes and hydro-agricultural developments, and steer the fight against poverty or child labour, as well as campaigns in favour of the promotion of women or the spread of contraception.

An institution as central as the World Bank not only plays a role as donor, it is also an agency for international expertise based on "development knowledge", i.e. on professional knowledge in social engineering (cf. below), related to the "manufacture" of standardised interventions that can be exported to low-income countries, particularly in Africa.

This is a specificity of the African continent. In Europe or America, public policies are essentially developed at national level, and the system of the United Nations and NGOs have little day-to-day influence on State governments. This dependence is a major historical feature of contemporary Africa. It is sometimes found in Latin America or Asia, but not to the same extent.

In other words, development aid and humanitarian aid function in Africa as specific public policies, designed, promoted and financed from outside, while being implemented by national players who are largely dependent on this aid. While there are also public policies developed at the national level, not only do they have few resources compared to aid-driven public policies, but their implementation is often inconsistent (Olivier de Sardan and Ridde, 2014), and they are often actively seeking donor support.

We know that there are many forms of aid that come from the North. Aid flows are channelled through international organisations (the UN system in

particular), national development agencies and banks, and large and small NGOs. The resources that aid provides arrive in Africa in the form of loans, grants, budget support, material donations, infrastructure construction, technical support, all with various degrees of conditionality. The aid architecture also varies, but with a clear preference for "projects" and "programmes", negotiated with the governments (for the most part) or with local organisations and associations (known as "civil society"). These projects and programmes are of limited duration. They are regulated by specific procedures that derogate from national procedures. They spring up as privileged enclaves (in terms of salaries, resources, operations, management) compared to the normal functioning of the national public services, which is marked by deprivation and corruption.

All these interventions are intended to improve the living conditions of African populations: what Tania Li calls "the will to improve" (Li, 2007) constitutes their legitimacy. They are presented as desirable "reforms" of a current situation that is highly unsatisfactory in the opinion of all (local populations and donors alike, but not for the same reasons). The paradox of this situation is that "reformers from outside" are driving the developmental and humanitarian social engineering that is taking place all over Africa. Development and humanitarian policies are in fact social engineering[2], i.e. "planned intervention systems, developed by experts, aimed at implementing or modifying institutions and/or behaviours in various contexts" (Olivier de Sardan, 2021, p. 7). Technical (and biological) engineering has an intrinsic effectiveness that is relatively independent of the context in which it is implemented, while social engineering is, on the contrary, very dependent on the context in which it is implemented.

Development and humanitarian aid constitute an extra-ordinary form of social engineering, with no historical equivalent: their interventions are omnipresent in Africa in standardised forms, but devised by international experts and are not directly related to market mechanisms, even if the market sometimes plays an important role. Nor do they depend on a single decision-making centre: a plethora of institutions intervene, generally in several or even all African countries, each with their own agenda, and there is little coordination

2 Most of the concepts used in this article (social engineering, but also contextual experts, critical reformism, pragmatic contexts, travelling models, practical norms) are explained in detail in the book *La revanche des contextes. Des mésaventures de l'ingénierie sociale, en Afrique et au-delà* (The revenge of contexts. The misadventures of social engineering, in Africa and beyond] (Olivier de Sardan, 2021).

among them, despite the existence of a common language and organisational isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991).

Let us avoid any misunderstanding. Our purpose here is not to condemn all development and humanitarian aid in principle, let alone to proclaim that it should be radically stopped. Nor is it to say that aid is a failure or that all development projects are only failures, which would be absurd. We are not taking a normative stance with regard to aid. Our starting point is that development programmes, humanitarian interventions and public policies, once implemented on the ground, have many unexpected effects, however "well thought-out" they may be, and whether they are assessed as successes or failures. This is true all over the world, but it is even more pronounced in Africa, because these programmes, interventions and public policies are drawn up by experts who are very external to local conditions. Moreover, what is of interest to us in this observation are the unexpected effects on the way public services in Africa operate. To put it another way, an excellent programme, generally considered beneficial and largely successful, carried out by this or that cooperation agency or NGO, with the best of intentions, will nonetheless experience discrepancies between what was planned and what actually happens in a given context, and, furthermore, will contribute "in spite of itself" to reproducing aid dependency within government departments.

The negative effects of aid

In many ways, aid functions as an "income". It has long been known that the incomes from mining or oil are not only economic assets, but also have many negative effects (for Gabon, see Yates, 1986), to the extent that we could speak of a "curse generated by these resources" (see Murshed, 2018). Development and humanitarian incomes are no exception, even if the negative effects they generate are often different (Collier, 2006; Bierschenk, 2009; Olivier de Sardan, 2013). Some are already well known, such as the spread of petty (and sometimes grand) corruption (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2007), or the disproportionate weight of per diems that divert training courses and workshops away from their goals (Jordan Smith, 2003; Ridde, 2010). Some are less so: for example,

the "brain drain" away from national civil services towards the "developmentalist configuration" (international institutions, development agencies, NGOs, consultancies) is continuously depriving African states of their best-trained and most competent officials.

This last point is connected to a more general phenomenon: the loss of initiative within African states and bureaucracies. The bulk of policy and action initiatives come from aid institutions. The main goal of most African civil servants is to be recruited by a "project", and if not, at least to be designated as its "focal point", or to benefit from its resources, formally or informally. You must "have your share" of aid, so you have to speak the language of aid, adopt the "best practices" promoted by aid organisations (in other words, be a "good student"), accept (or pretend to accept) their rules of the game and their procedures, in other words, play on their side, rather than trying to improve your own side from your own ideas and means.

This is true at the highest levels of government as well as the lowest. Research by Lasdel[3] on how Nigerien managers perceive aid (Lavigne Delville and Abdelkader, 2010) showed that they reproached government authorities for systematically accepting any project proposed by technical and financial partners (TFPs) that was endowed with interesting resources, and even if it was not suited to the country's needs, or had little chance of success. At the grassroots level, the large number of "practical norms" that informally regulate the multiple behaviour patterns of civil servants who do not comply with official norms and directives (i.e. "non-compliant" behaviours) testifies to the importance of the gaps between official discourse and the realities on the ground (Olivier de Sardan, 2015, 2021), between programmes on paper and their actual implementation in a specific context, between organisational charts displayed and actual practices, between formal and informal accountabilities (Blundo, 2015). This "great divide", and quasi-schizophrenia, also have the effect of producing poor quality services for delivery to the population (think absenteeism, favouritism, corruption, among many other practical norms), and a focus on capturing aid resources. It is true that in the course of our investigations we encountered some "admirable exceptions", state employees who prioritise the quality of care or education in their work, and who draw up local micro-re-

3 Lasdel is a Nigerian-Beninese research laboratory specialising in qualitative methods, whose work is at the origin of the analyses developed in this text (www.lasdel.net).

forms, but they are clearly in the minority, generally isolated, often bitter, and rarely supported by their superiors.

There is , however, one area in Africa where the inventiveness and ingenuity are remarkable, and where they have already been analysed and even celebrated: the informal sector (Hart, 2008; Meagher, 2010). But they show up precisely far from the state, and even farther away from the donors. We could also mention (but this area is emphasised less, and when it is mentioned, it is in an eminently critical register) local and national politics, which evidence, in power games, clientelist manoeuvres, alliances, ruptures, intrigues and other transhumances, a formidable inventiveness, far removed from the democratic injunctions and the often naïve politico-moral recommendations of the international experts. But all this is also very opaque to the aid agencies, which are not invited and can hardly interfere.

As for "civil society", celebrated by NGOs and aid agencies, which see in it a capacity for endogenous mobilisation, our assessment is much more reserved: the various national and local associations (for civil society is in fact nothing more than a heterogeneous fabric of associations) are most often in tow of external aid, anxious to capture "projects", in which they generally play a subcontracting role, having a say only in minor aspects. While civil society has real forums with room for manoeuvre and innovation and includes autonomous reformers, overall it is highly dependent on aid. Moreover, the most creative associative activists are most often snapped up by the development world, trained in its language and integrated into its procedures. This is also true for women: the gender policies pursued by international institutions, development agencies and large NGOs often result in absorbing women activists and/or feminist leaders into the social engineering of aid rather than supporting their own initiatives and increasing their autonomy.

It was to be expected: the lack of initiative in public administrations and services correlates directly to the pervasiveness of aid, and is by no means a general characteristic of African societies. This is indeed a vicious circle: aid dependency blocks internal initiatives, which increases aid dependency.

Another negative effect is the feeling of humiliation that comes from this dependence. There is an oft-quoted African proverb on this subject: "The hand that receives is always below the hand that gives." There is widespread anti-Western sentiment fuelled by this assisted status, which is all the more acute

towards the former colonial power. It is aggravated by the frequent clumsiness or arrogance of the "partners", as well as by their propensity to want to impose their own moral values, and it is frequently expressed in various registers, in social media, in everyday chatter, and during demonstrations. It is obviously exploited by Salafist Islamist ideology, and makes opportunistic behaviour and double talk with regard to external aid all the more legitimate.

The trial of the context and the central role of pragmatic contexts

An important characteristic of the development and humanitarian world is its predilection for "travelling models" of social engineering (Behrends et al., 2014; Bierschenk, 2014; Olivier de Sardan et al., 2017).

It is about promoting across Africa a succession of standardised, "high-impact" interventions, each of which is expected to have intrinsic effectiveness, regardless of the contexts into which it is introduced. However, contrary to the expectations of the experts who have produced these models and the politicians who have accepted them, things are very different on the ground. Each local context "undermines", to a greater or lesser extent, and in its own way, the course of interventions (public policies, programmes, projects, protocols, etc.), which are much more often circumvented or carved up than adopted faithfully. All travelling models, however well designed, and however perfect they may be technically or technocratically, are thus subjected to the "trial of the context", a test with unpredictable results, which often turns into the "revenge of the context".

And yet development and humanitarian experts and policy-makers know that contexts matter, and they accumulate knowledge about them. But what they mean by "knowledge related to the context" consists mainly of statistical indicators, socio-demographic variables, institutional data, cultural or "ethnic" clichés. These are "map bases", not much more, which only document what we call "structural contexts". However, this knowledge says nothing about the "pragmatic contexts", i.e. the interplay of actors, the practical norms of civil servants, the routines of departments and offices, the relationships of power and influence, the expectations, perceptions, frustrations and rumours, the clans, cliques and factions, which structure the daily life of the administrations and

the populations with whom they interact. Public policies only mobilise knowledge about structural contexts, and ignore the reality of pragmatic contexts.

Technical engineering expertise (on which the technical aspects of development aid and humanitarian aid are based[4]) and social development engineering expertise (on which the programmes in which these technical aspects are embedded are based) remain in a sense "above the ground" due to the lack of "contextual" expertise, which is not mastered by aid designers or managers. It is true that there are other reasons for the failure of international development institutions to take account of pragmatic contexts, such as an accountability focused on Northern institutions alone, or the fact that action cannot be burdened with too much information (Naudet, 2001): in other words, even if aid agencies are concerned with commissioning study after study, piling up consultants' reports, or recruiting the services of experts they believe know the country and the area of intervention, they scarcely use the knowledge produced in this way. The fact remains that this knowledge is mainly about structural contexts, not pragmatic ones.

Only knowledge of pragmatic contexts can provide a basis for contextual expertise. This implies a strong proximity to the actors on the ground involved in an intervention. It is necessary to know the "non-observant" behaviour of health workers, the calculations and uncertainties of farmers, the habits and ambitions of magistrates, the concerns and representations of patients. This requires a daily insertion, a shared experience, commonplace interactions. International experts in development, humanitarian aid or public policy are generally a far cry from this. They are competent in their engineering fields, but particularly ignorant of the contexts experienced by the actors concerned. Analysis of statistics, the reading of reports, guided tours at breakneck speed, a few discussions with local officials or taxi drivers do not give any real access to pragmatic contexts; nor does being more or less friends with a minister or having an ongoing relationship with a local courtesan. The "local knowledge" that some development professionals boast about (the caricatured type would be: the claim that "I have been to Togo and I know the Togolese" is therefore largely overrated, and often ridiculous, and in any case remains general and superficial.

4 Political engineering (Darbon, 2003) is for us a component of social engineering. The same is true of religious engineering (note in passing that the current successes of Muslim and Christian fundamentalisms are largely due to their ability to be inserted into everyday contexts).

But, on the other hand, being an African citizen and speaking a vernacular does not in itself qualify one for contextual expertise. National decision-makers and senior managers are generally far removed from the day-to-day realities on the ground.

We were often surprised, when we reported on our surveys with Nigerien managers, at their lack of knowledge of the data we had produced. One doctor was unaware of what was really going on in his department and the multiple practical standards of midwives.

A university lecturer working on the agropastoral system did not have a good grasp on the real context of a departmental livestock service and its thousand and one schemes. The majority of senior civil servants and members of the political elite know little about the daily lives of nurses, teachers, agricultural extension workers, court clerks and secretaries. In fact, some really don't know, others have a vague suspicion but don't want to look any closer, and others know something about it but feel that it should "stay between us", that it is "none of the white man's business"; more generally, they feel that it is not relevant either in the (very conventional) language of development or in the (very guarded) language of national politics.

As for development agencies that recruit African executives with the idea that they will contribute the mastery of the context that they expatriates lack, the most often they are mistaken: these managers are, with a few exceptions, largely cut off from their compatriots down below and are more concerned with respecting the rules of the game of the institution that employs them than with taking into account the logic of action of ordinary users or small civil servants, whom they often ignore or look down upon.

The three properties of contextual expertise

Only a real familiarity with everyday practices and relationships can provide a basis for contextual expertise. This is because actual practices are often out of step with the prescribed practices, and everyday life is often more informal than formal, latent than explicit. The real world is far removed from the official world in which development institutions operate almost exclusively. A superficial

knowledge or episodic contacts are not enough to build contextual expertise. It requires close knowledge of the work environment, its constraints, its discreet or hidden realities.

But while this close knowledge is a necessary condition, is not a sufficient condition. If this were the case, any health worker, farmer, magistrate and patient could be considered a contextual expert in the field in which they work. We believe that more is required. It also requires a certain ability to take a step back, a minimum critical distance. In other words, to a practice of closeness we must add a skill of reflection. A contextual expert not only knows the reality of a clinic, a farm, a court of law or a demand for health care "from the inside", but they can also describe the problems, the flaws and the bottlenecks. They can testify to what works and what doesn't, attest to deviations from official procedures and directives, analyse the many tinkerings, tips and arrangements of everyday life. They know that the official rules are far from being applied, either because they are impossible to apply or because they do not suit the actors on the ground; they know the practical norms that replace them and regulate daily routines, and they are sensitive to their limits and the inconveniences they entail for the user.

Lastly, we will add a third dimension to contextual expertise: "concernment" (Canguilhem, 1991), in other words, an implication in the improvement of the usual course of things, a desire to make the delivery of services to the population more responsive, more benevolent, more effective, more equitable, of better quality, a certain willingness to innovate, to seek practical solutions, to make concrete reforms.

There was a time when "concernment" often took the form of political engagement, in Africa as in Europe, when the changes hoped for were not limited to professional spheres of social engineering, but were expressed through radical criticism and ambitious political projects. Disillusionment arrived, the utopias went wrong. Concernment aimed at providing better health care or education, making justice fairer or ensuring security that respects citizens, is certainly less ambitious than the emancipatory ideologies born of the struggles of the proletariat or the movements for national liberation; it is more realistic and more discreet, but it nonetheless constitutes a major quality, indispensable to the contextual experts to be able to constitute counterbalances to the current dependence.

Familiarity, critical capacity, concernment: these are the three characteristics that define contextual expertise.

Contextual expertise and methodological populism

It may be useful here to explain how this definition of contextual expertise, which emerged from thousands of hours of Lasdel's investigation of bureaucratic practices and modes of social engineering intervention in African contexts (in other words, modes of governance), relates to some of the more general debates on expertise.

Indeed, for some decades now there have been various attempts within the social sciences to somehow broaden expertise beyond experts. Expertise in the usual sense is based on recognised professional skills (technical, social, managerial, etc.), usually validated institutionally (diplomas, curricula, job positions), which reflect a certain form of elitism based on specialised knowledge in a particular field. However, in the wake of the rehabilitation of popular knowledge in the face of specialist knowledge, grassroots actors are sometimes considered to have a certain form of expertise, different from that of scholarly experts, but no less valid, and sometimes even more valid. Already in the 1980s, various studies on African peasantry had highlighted the good local control of soils, seeds and climates by farmers, contrasting it with the abstract knowledge of agronomists, based on theoretical knowledge and station and laboratory experiments, but far removed from the conditions and constraints of working the land in a real context (Richards, 1985, 1986; Boiral, Lantéri and Olivier de Sardan, 1985; Chauveau and Yung, 1995). This type of analysis applies beyond farmers: all occupations that do not depend on specialised studies nonetheless presuppose expertise acquired on the job (Sennett, 2008): farmers, workers, craftsmen or employees have knowledge and know-how about their working conditions and how their profession is practised "in real life" that the engineer and technocrat lack. This "everyday expertise" (Sennett, 2009), this "working knowledge" (Sintomer, 2008), is not generally recognised by professional and social hierarchies.

This broadening of the notion of expertise is not unrelated to the concept of "agency" discussed by Antony Giddens (1984), which has been widely taken

up in sociology: each social actor, whoever they may be, has room to manoeuvre, and have their own capacities for knowledge and action. A similar analysis can be found, this time in the field of political economy and with a developmental orientation, in Amartya Sen and his concept of "capability" (Sen, 2000). Finally, this relates in this field to the perspective of "methodological populism" (Olivier de Sardan, 2008b), which is common in anthropology: dominated, marginalised or stigmatised social groups deserve the greatest attention from the social sciences, which must investigate their knowledge, perceptions and practices (already in the 1960s, Oscar Lewis had systematically studied the "cultures of poverty" in the West Indies and Latin America; see Lewis, 1969).

This does not, however, mean that all knowledge is equal in terms of action, or that knowledge from below is necessarily superior to knowledge from above. As much as methodological populism is productive in terms of research, it is important to avoid the pitfalls of "ideological populism", which would give subordinate players a monopoly on truth or grant them ontological superiority or epistemological immunity. If every social player, however poor, holds some form of expertise, if every actor is at least an expert on his or her own life, not all expertise is equal when it comes to changing behaviour or institutions.

From the perspective of social change, or more precisely, when from the perspective of improving public policies (i.e. improving the quality of services provided to the population by public players), it is more productive to ask what types of expertise should be combined. This is where contextual expertise comes into play, not as a miracle solution that could consign social engineering expertise to oblivion, but as a missing link in the drafting and implementation of public policies, enabling a "resumption of initiative" among State agents, and less dependence on external expertise.

Who are the contextual experts when it comes to social engineering?

Let us return to the trinity "familiarity, critical capacity, concernment". Who ticks these three boxes with regard to the implementation of social engineering?

If we are looking at the trial of the context, the most interesting category of

contextual experts are directly involved player son the ground. Their familiarity is based on their own belonging to the contexts themselves, in which they work and live in a kind of "natural" way. They are "experts in daily life", they have "working expertise". We are dealing with what could be called direct contextual experts, provided that they also possess the other two characteristics: they can lucidly analyse the situations they participate in, and they feel implicated in potential changes.

These "admirable exceptions" mentioned above, these "reformers from within" whom we have sometimes met in the course of our inves- tigations over the last twenty years, are typically contextual experts: nurses or doctors, schoolteachers or professors, court clerks or magistrates (familiarity), all critical of the current state of public services, far from the official language of clichés that reigns in the administration (critical capacity), all concerned with improving its functioning, in contrast to the passivity or resignation of most of their colleagues (concernment). They are few in number, not very visible, often not very talkative, but they exist.

There is a second potential category of contextual experts, indirect contextual experts, who are also able to combine the three necessary characteristics: these are social scientists who practice long-term insertion in the professional environments they study (i.e. socio-anthropologists and all those - whatever their discipline – who conduct qualitative research based on immersion, observation, free interviews). Their familiarity with local contexts is different, as it is not based on "naturally" belonging to these contexts, but on the fact that they have been in contact with them in sufficient depth and on a daily basis (most often in the context of an ethnographic-type survey) to know its inner workings, its underpinnings and its implicit meanings: they have mastered its codes, the innuendos, strategies and discourses. As for critical distance, this is a pre-requisite professional skill for them. There remains concernment, which is not automatic. Many researchers do not feel directly and personally involved in improving the public services of the country where they work (this is a question of positionality: see below), either because they confine themselves to basic research or because they are foreigners to that country and have no citizen commitment towards it. African researchers are obviously more willing to be civically concerned.

If we now come back to the question of innovations and the imperative to

put internal innovations at the heart of (necessary) public service reforms, then the direct contextual experts are obviously at the centre of the game. It is they who need to be identified (no easy task), and it is their backgrounds and practices that need to be documented. Indirect contextual experts are well placed to do this. Understanding the motivations and choices of contextual (direct) experts, analysing their relationships with their colleagues, and studying their successes and failures seems to us to be a fundamental line of research for African social sciences, at least those that have chosen to carry out in-depth, in situ empirical research.

Very little knowledge has been produced on such players. Donors have little interest in this area, as they are prisoners of institutional perspectives, organisational charts, respect for hierarchies, conventions and official norms, and relations with governments, and moreover they are primarily concerned with compliance with protocols and the level of indicators for the implementation of the activities they promote: there is therefore a lack of funding for research on a theme which concerns informal, discrete innovations, and which in addition, more often than not remain invisible to the ministries of African capitals, and therefore even more so to international institutions.

In 2004, Lasdel submitted a pioneering 3-year research programme to Belgian cooperation (BTC), leader in the health sector in Niger: the aim was to identify, in the health region of Dosso (the preferred site for interventions by Belgian medical cooperation), a certain number of "reforming" or "innovative" health professionals, delivering better than average quality services, an identification made on the basis of criteria established through interviews conducted with numerous actors in the local health arena (care workers, members of health centre management committees, local authorities, etc.). In a second phase, the research programme focused on collecting the biographies of the selected "reformers", in an attempt to understand some of the factors that might explain, at least partially, why they were particularly "concerned" with the quality of care or the improvement of how the service operated. This programme was negotiated with a Belgian technical assistant who was sensitive to the originality of the theme and the potential that could result in terms of action for Belgian cooperation.

After a year of work by Lasdel researchers, the technical assistant's contract expired, and his replacement refused, with no explanation, to continue funding

the programme. The data produced has remained in boxes until now, and is hardly usable anymore, as it is incomplete and outdated.

Nevertheless, more and more international development and humanitarian professionals are aware of the limitations and frequent failures of traveller models, the poor state of public services, and the usefulness of in-depth qualitative research, both on the contextual trials of their programmes and the resulting "workarounds", and on the "actual" functioning of public services and the "non-observant" practices of their agents. They may not usually hold key positions in the major institutions and do not have the ear of important decision-makers, but it is to be hoped that, thanks to them, windows of opportunity will open up for research on the "reformers from within".

For example, an article published in the Lancet (Maaloe et al., 2021) criticises the standardised clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) widely used in low-income countries as being unsuitable for local contexts, and calls for front-line health providers to be involved in the drafting of realistic clinical guidelines as "co-creators", because they are "experts" in delivering care in precarious situations.

However, if we are to gradually achieve freedom from aid dependency, the main interlocutors of African researchers should not be international development and humanitarian professionals, but rather national public actors at all levels. It is the executives of African countries, national experts in social engineering, and decision-makers in the public service who must be convinced of the "plus" that can be brought by, on the one hand, rigorous diagnoses of the "real" functioning of public services, and on the other hand, in-depth documentation of endogenous innovations within them. But it is a long fight and the game has not yet been won.

In terms of diagnosis, the High Commission for the Modernisation of the State, which is attached to the Prime Minister's Office, asked Lasdel in 2014 to carry out research on the "non-compliant" behaviour of Nigerien civil servants, in full knowledge of Lasdel's critical approach, its concern to carry out rigorous empirical investigations, and its refusal of any complacency or "empty jargon" (Olivier de Sardan, 2014). We presented the main conclusions, which were severe and which were not contested, to the Prime Minister, several ministers and many senior officials. It was therefore a first step: it is an exceptional situation that this type of study is requested by a national authority from a national laboratory and that the results are accepted. However, the diagnosis did not lead

to any significant measures being taken within the civil service in the years that followed. It remained just another report, placed in a ever-growing pile. However, just recently, the Lasdel diagnosis was put back on the agenda by the authorities in a perspective of administrative reform. We can therefore hope that it has allowed and will continue to allow for some awareness raising, some critical attitudes or some innovative behaviour.

In terms of innovation, since 2016 Lasdel has been experimenting (with funding from the Canadian IDRC, which has now ended) with action research on the identification and networking of "contextual experts" in the field of maternal and child health in Niger and Benin, a network formed from research that has highlighted various local reforms driven by field staff without donor intervention. A workshop of Nigerien contextual experts made a series of realistic proposals on the major dysfunctions of the maternal health system that the standardised programmes of the technical and financial partners have failed to correct over the past 20 years. But we have had no response to our report from either the Ministry of Health or the West African Health Organisation.

In the Lancet article cited above, the case of Kenya is mentioned as a rare example of the endogenous production of health protocols, at the national level, not starting from WHO guidelines, and with an active role played by health professionals on the ground (see English et al., 2017).

For the involvement of conceptual experts in national public policies

Having conceptual experts play a meaningful role in the design and implementation of national public policies is certainly not an easy task. This must therefore be done through a complex experimental process, which includes several steps and implies certain favourable conditions, which are far from always being met. By outlining some proposals here, we are leaving the researcher's comfort zone, their perimeter of competence, to take risks as a concerned (Nigerian) citizen.

Steps

The first step is obviously the identification of contextual experts according to the areas of administration that are chosen to conduct the experiment. Areas such as education or health can be prioritised, but by proceeding in steps, starting with particular sectors such as maternal health or primary education. Identification cannot be achieved through the hierarchy because of the importance of patronage, favouritism and corruption in human resource management. Detailed ad hoc surveys are therefore necessary. They should preferably be conducted by national researchers (if they have the necessary skills), who are more familiar with local contexts than their Northern colleagues, but only to the extent that they have no conflicts of interest and as far as they are not subject to forms of censorship or pressure. These surveys not only identify contextual experts, but they also document their practices, the innovations and reforms they have implemented, their successes (and their failures).

The second step is to allow the contextual experts identified in each particular field to form a network, to enable them to exchange their experiences, to compare their innovations, assess what can be imported from one working context to another at the cost of various adaptations.

The third step proposes that the contextual experts address the "critical nodes", bottlenecks, unresolved problems of their respective administrations. They are asked to go beyond the context of their work to make a diagnosis and realistic proposals, from a national perspective, to improve or correct what can be improved. These three steps were taken in the context of the Lasdel action research mentioned above, targeting maternal health professionals in Niger. But the process is currently stopped at this level.

The fourth step is to scale up the scheme on the national stage. On the one hand, this would consist of initiating collaboration between contextual experts, national experts and national decision-makers in the chosen field (in the case of the process initiated by Lasdel, this would be the Nigerien health system) in order to find low-cost national solutions to the problems encountered in this field. On the other hand, internal innovations within administrations should be promoted through media campaigns. Finally, staff training schools would incorporate modules and field trips on this topic into their curricula.

Conditions

It can be seen that these different steps require different conditions to be fulfilled. The first three require only relatively modest funding (which may come from donors, but it would be much better for the state to take charge of the process). But it also requires a minimum endorsement from the ministry in charge, often acquired through the presence of allies or favourable actors within it. However, an endorsement does not mean a commitment or involvement. What is mainly required are researchers who are motivated by this type of experience, who are familiar with the field concerned, and who are trained in qualitative methods.

The last step requires a real political commitment at government level. Giving national visibility to contextual experts, even if it is an experiment, even if it concerns relatively circumscribed fields (maternal health, primary school teachers, court registrars, road safety, etc.), means coming up against interests, disturbing routines, and therefore meeting resistance. It therefore requires support from high-level decision-makers, strong political support, and solid backing from the top levels of government. A recognised public institution needs to embrace this orientation and make it its own.

Conclusion

There was a time (1960s–1980s) when the slogan "rely on your own strength" was circulating in Marxist and anti-imperialist circles. Widely promoted by Maoist China and the Vietnamese FLN, it was taken up in Africa by regimes that claimed to be revolutionary. Unfortunately, reality often proved to be far removed from the rhetoric, and the slogan has disappeared as have the illusions associated with these regimes. Only Thomas Sankara is remembered, which shows that the innovations he introduced and the attempts he made to lead his country out of dependence still have a positive echo among African youth. This may be a reason for some optimism.

Indeed, the strategy of "relying on your own strengths" is not in itself absurd, and undoubtedly deserves to be rehabilitated to a certain extent, or, more precisely, one may wish that it be rethought and refounded on new bases. It is no

longer a question of situating oneself in a Marxist-Leninist perspective, nor of hoping for a radical break with imperialism, which has now become neo-liberal globalisation, nor of creating self-sufficient revolutionary fortresses[5]. For example, contextual experts will not replace social engineering experts, but they will counterbalance the power of the latter in the development and implementation of public policies, where they will bring knowledge and skills "from the ground" that are currently lacking.

It is a question of inventing multiple progressive breaks, often low-key, always low-cost, with aid dependency, of promoting as much as possible endogenous initiatives and local innovations, of supporting reformers from within. It is obviously a political struggle, in the broadest sense of the word, but one that is far removed from party politics and is based on small steps, on trials and experiments, on betting and risk-taking, and is therefore of an incremental nature. It is a patient, long-term struggle, which does not correspond to the short time frame of programmes and projects (usually limited to four years) and the equally short time frame of parties (from one election to the next). It is a struggle that does not depend on injunctions coming from the top, it does not wait for some Maximum Leader, because it can and must be carried out at different levels of the State and society: at the bottom by users, by players in associations, by public agents in contact with the population (the "interface civil servants", or street level bureaucrats, Lipsky, 1980); in the middle by administrative executives, heads of departments, council officials; and at the top by political leaders, general directors, high commissioners, ministers... Can we not dream of such a reforming alliance, beyond the changes of governments and political in-fighting?

But this political or militant struggle is also addressed to researchers, as it covers a scientific orientation that is part of the perspective of what we have called "critical reformism". For political scientists, sociologists or anthropologists who analyse social engineering (in particular development and humanitarian aid, public policies, the way governments and public services are run), critical reformism is one of the four citizen stances or "civic positionalities" available to any researcher. The other three civic positionalities are "pure" re-

5 Clarification may be useful here to avoid possible misunderstandings: the intellectual legacy of Marx and his successors must be reconsidered in a rigorous way, and thus neither rejected nor defended outright.

search (not directly concerned with action), "applied" research (directly serving an institution), and "radical" research (focused on denunciation). Critical reformism can be defined as "combining independence with respect to the institutions concerned, a desire to contribute to improving interventions, and a critical, empirically-based analysis of their design and implementation".

Well-documented and uncompromising diagnoses of the operation of public services and public policies are in some ways part of the DNA of critical reformism as practised by a growing number of African researchers.

For 20 years, Lasdel has been a major producer of such diagnoses (but not the only one), which make it possible to highlight, among other things, various concrete facets of aid dependency and its negative effects. Many of them are freely available in the 128 issues of the Lasdel Studies and Works series[6].

But the identification and documentation of "insider" innovations and contextual experts must also be part of the remit of critical reformist research. For they constitute one of the main ways of no longer blindly following the recommendations, incentives and interventions of the "partners" from the North, of encouraging initiative and imagination within the administrations and public services in Africa itself, in other words, of implementing a renewed and realistic strategy of "relying on one's own strengths", which will make it possible to gradually break the vicious circle of aid dependence.

6 http://www.lasdel.net/index.php/nos-activites/etudes-travaux

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His latest book (2021) takes stock of these thirty years of personal and collective research within the framework of Lasdel: La Revanche des contextes. Des mésaventures de l'ingénierie sociale, en Afrique et au-delà.

Copy & paste and inconsistency in Africa

Towards a reform of our states so that they may flourish again

Isaac Dakono*

Preamble

The fragmentation of the earth's geography did not only result in the African part being confined in an endless chaos reminiscent of a labyrinth. Although the turmoil in Africa has worsened severely in recent years in terms of underdevelopment, crime, radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. Indeed, in almost all the countries, including almost all of West Africa, stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, from Mauritania to Somalia; and Central Africa, including the southern Sahara, the eastern West African Shield and the western Great Rift Valley; over the years, crises have become a major concern for the State and for the citizens.

The map contours of the major part of the African continent show that contemporary realities are areas dotted with crises that are more or less profound, and, above all, multidimensional. Conflict and tensions flare up repeatedly in spots, threatening the existence of tens of millions of human beings. Crisis also manifests itself in the failure of public institutions and the breakdown in the delivery of basic public services. The agricultural policies implemented have proven to be counter-productive and the countryside is being depopulated, aggravating the problems of urbanisation and security in the cities. "There is no better way out of poverty than in cities. Cities are the best at transforming ci-

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vilisations. But there are also demons that go hand in hand with density[1]. A large, malleable and capricious body, the continent is said to be engaged in a devastating process of self-destruction[2]. One thing leading to another, all the countries have become powder kegs with deplorable security situations, social fabrics undermined by misery, unemployment, rural exodus, immigration and emigration have become fashionable; endemic and/or epidemic diseases and other pandemics have taken up residence.

But here is the reason why, in this place, as part of the present day tragedy, Africa cries and groans, but it is not some Dantesque hell doomed to be subjected to the law of guns, pandemics and epidemics. This affair in progress is far from being an accident, it is the fruit of a tangle of causes and effects; and it is not a final judgment. There is no need to state how this structurally undermines the efforts made here and there. There is certainly sharply in focus with regard to this existing situation, a commonly shared feeling that there is no way out of this reality, and it is the reflection of a system that has reached its limits. We need to give our Africa a new way of seeing. And accept the fact that African issues are global.

"Legal States" and "Real Countries"

The *Quasi-nation-state* that emerged from independence continues to struggle with its legitimacy in Africa, and is increasingly unable to ensure the long-term *security* of the population. This fact is merely a consequence of the inconsistencies that have been maintained since its inception. One may wonder nowadays the extent to which African states are anchored in African societies. And how effective are these states?

Let us therefore recall that our planetary space, which is Africa, is a legacy of great empires; in particular, the Kongo kingdom, the Mupata, Ghanaian, Malian and more recently the Songhay empires, which were successful forms of human organisation in Africa. These groupings of people and territory were

1..Ibid. Annual Bank Conference on Africa, Opening Session, 13 June 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 37058T4JyX4&feature=youtu.be&t=10m07s, accessed November 2016.

2 Achille Mbembe, De la post colonie. Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine [On the postcolony], Paris, Karthala, 2000.

worthy to be called empires, and were endowed with vast areas of land larger than our current states. They were able to prosper and achieve levels of integration and harmony that are still enviable today. They deserve our attention, if need be, to demonstrate that the land that houses today's states once hosted political systems that provided a framework for the lives and hopes of millions of human beings.

Why then are African political systems not in phase with African societies?

The legacy of colonisation militates in favour of this fact; it is heavy and continues to haunt, especially at the institutional and administrative level. In the euphoria of the independence years, in their desire for self-determination, our nascent states aligned themselves with *Models*. In many ways it was a case of *copy and paste*.

Today, the observation is clear, and the facts are sacred. Portuguese-speaking Africa is imprinted with the Portuguese system, the former French colonies are an extension of metropolitan France, and are still occasionally called the French Community; the British colonies, on the other hand, continue to struggle under the yoke of the Anglo-Saxon system... *Black people*, once a raw material, have been kneaded over the ages by external influences.

So we have *clone states* in Africa that have been spawned by colonial systems through copycat reproduction. In their frantic quest, the first clerks hired by the colonial system, who could be *carved like stone and exploited at will,* and who were responsible for leading these African countries into their first hours of independence, had no alternative but to reproduce their experiences in the local systems. *"In general, West Africa has behaved like a vast cul-de-sac, receiving, diluting, and ultimately assimilating or sterilising external elements*[3]" Like a ricochet, the choice of institutions, their mode of administration, the legal system and many other elements were modelled on that of the invader, implying to a large extent *inconsistencies*. These actions placed the milestones of the future instability in these countries.

It is also clear that many states in their current form are rejected by the communities because they were conceived in disregard of the local realities often linked to the history of these peoples. This establishes a gap between state and society, which must be corrected immediately, as Africa must reclaim its own

3 TRIMINGHAM S., History of Islam in West Africa, 1962, p 19

cultural expressions for the purposes of *legitimate governance*. To quote Horace[4], *"naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret"* which translates as "if you chase nature with a pitchfork, it will always come running back".

Lack of vision and historical depth or *denial of reality*[5]. The corollary of this practice of importing and exporting political systems was a fragmented understanding that eluded local considerations related to diversity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a lack of historical depth in the desire to constitute a community of life; we then erroneously manufactured our political systems as if independence marked their beginning. There is no need to recall here that the communities were living long before, for those who understand the history of the great empires that have marked this space. According to Daniel Bourmaud[6] *"Africanist political science was forged in the observation that the anthropological and historical diversion was essential for anyone wishing to grasp contemporary political reality"*.

In other words, it is pretentious to consider the political systems in Africa without due care and attention to the socio-historical realities through which they owe their existence. Legitimacy cannot be built by ignoring the aspirations, dynamics as well as the constraints of local communities. To caricature, we are faced with non-indigenous states that are ruling over indigenous communities. Dixit a non-conformist activist. In the meantime, therefore, African leaders will need to avoid the *"tyranny of urgency"* and instead create a shared vision of the way their countries should move forward.

It is therefore safe to say that the social changes currently taking place in Africa are the perfect opportunity to backfill these *empty shell states*. In view of the existing package of challenges, we must therefore develop a clear vision of the outcomes towards which these processes of social transformation are leading us. Progress is undoubtedly achieved through transitions rather than radical changes. Mastering these transformations means drawing up a roadmap.

4 QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS, half a century before Christ, Liv.1, epistle X, V.24

5 Dr. Ousmane SY, Political analyst, Former Minister in Mali, President of the regional council of the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa (ARGA).

6 Daniel Bourmeaud, La politique en Afrique [Politics in Africa], 1997, Editions Montchrestien, page7, 160 pages

The package of challenges

1 Calibrating states to local African realities

Our states in Africa are rejected as they are. It is our consideration that there is a disconnect between African societies and states as they have been imported, and the divorce seems more than ever consummated. The attempt to *"copy and paste"* has failed, resulting in major pathologies; exposing states alien to their adoptive societies. Let us therefore start from our realities to build our states.

2 Restoring Republican Legality

All community life inevitably requires rules that are binding on everyone; it is understood that the rule of law is a condition of social balance. In our states, the lack of legitimacy, of transparent rules of power management, combined with oligarchy and *repressive democracy* are no secret. It is therefore essential to re-establish the rule of law.

3 Establishing local governance or the perspective of the *pluri-national state*

The common project for society must first be discussed and legitimised. The state has less capacity to intervene when it is not based on the local level. The general observation is that there is *"less state"* and *"better state"*. Operational institutional and legislative mechanisms must therefore be put in place that guarantee transparency, equity, participation of all in the life of the local space as well as the shared and concerted management of the local community. And the direction is from local to global.

4 Investing in *people* and envisioning a new citizen

Assistance fosters enslavement. We must divest ourselves and acquire our own capacities to act deliberately. Building national capacity is strategic for our development. Also, nationality and citizenship must be conjugated. Training in the acquisition of technical knowledge and educating for citizenship behaviour remains a major challenge for African states.

Some proposals to revive our nation states
From state emphasis to local realities,

1 Recognise our states as the sum of several sociological nationalities.

The coupling of the sociological nation (cultural eras) with the legal nation (State), presupposes that the states are configured in alignment with the cultural realities of our societies. The recognition of these sociological nations would therefore be a first step towards the sustainable resolution of the many identity-based conflicts in Africa. The cases of Mali, Cameroon, Rwanda, Senegal, Guinea Conakry, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, etc., are illustrative of this.

In many countries, a foreign state apparatus has been established. It is a question of correcting it and orienting it in the direction of current requirements. For observation reveals today that despite being scattered across a number of states of the empires (of Ghana, Mali, Noupé, Monomotapa, Ifé, etc.) as well as several other kingdoms (Bambara, Baol, Mossi, Tekrur, Bamiléké), the groups refer to and identify themselves first and foremost with their community of character (E.g.: Arab, Diola, Tutsi, Hutti, Tuareg, Hausa, Banya Mulengue, Akan, Bamileke, and so on).

Attempts at standardisation have therefore failed. The sociological nations continue to survive across borders and the isolationism of identity politics is very apparent. It is therefore necessary to recognise a space for expression for everyone. The recognition of the status of sociological nationalities necessarily leads to the acceptance of the idea of the existence and legitimacy of particular rights, which unfortunately the modern legal arsenal has confined to "customary rights" in order to deny them any legitimacy; they must be rehabilitated.

2 Banishing social stigma from national consciousness

Our states are for the most part made up of minorities in the sense of communities. The idea of majority is therefore *a conscious construct*.

Granting all sociological components the privileges attached to *"living together"* would considerably reduce the stigmatisation of national consciousness and the many sources of conflict that destabilise our countries.

In such a case, the nationality recognised to citizens with reference to the

different sociological components of the state would prevent its use for political purposes and avoid *mass manipulation*. It is understood that the fact that the rights of the majority cannot be enforced against the rights of the minority *(principles of equality and the right to be different)* confers the same rights and duties on all the sociological components. If each component felt heard and understood this would help to erase social stigma.

3 Building a Positive Alliance with the *"Local Elites"*

The traditional and religious authorities (the Mourides in Senegal, the Cherif and Cadis in Mali, the Mossi chiefs in Burkina Faso, etc.) still have a great deal of influence[7], especially on political choices. They also act as a powerful, alternative social force, capable of managing conflicts and organising social life according to customary or religious methods.

The "local" elites (whether they emanate from custom, religion or simply economic power) constitute relays of mediation and social mobilisation, because of their moral credit or their economic weight. In Mali, in these dark times of armed rebellion and community conflict in the centre, community leaders in the centre have facilitated community dialogue meetings, which have resulted in the signing of a peace pact. In our opinion, because of the social structure of power specific to African societies, these elites are poles for the development of local opinions and the impetus of community decisions.

The dialogue between these legitimacies and the new methods of local organisation requires mutual recognition. This must be expressed in an organised way that values the contributions of each *stakeholder (depository of legitimacy)* in the management of the community's problems. The recognition of the rights conferred on sociological nationalities would rehabilitate local legitimacies, which would become a cornerstone of the architecture of *legitimate governance.*

7 Interview with a respondent (judge) in Timbuktu, Mali: "The Cadis have a lot of influence on the law in this locality, people believe in their justice more than in so-called modern justice. They therefore prefer to refer to them rather than to the State judge"
CADIS are traditional authorities who act as judges in the northern localities of Mali

Restoring the rule of law,

1 Instilling Republican values

From the outset, it is not a question of legalism, but of anchoring the values of the republic fundamentally in the individual and collective culture. This is certainly a long-term task which can be achieved by introducing lifelong learning and the development of human capital in co-construction.

It should follow the socialisation process of the social embryo as a guide. Also, drawing on the main places where values and beliefs are produced: the village, the family, the entourage, the place of worship, the school, the workplace. In these places, opinion leaders can be identified (parents, religious leaders, teachers, employers, etc.) on whom society should invest to serve as reference points and convey positive messages.

In addition, a principle such as: Ignorance of the law is no excuse is inoperative, empty of content and devoid of effectiveness for those who understand its meaning and scope. Texts drafted in foreign languages, full of conceptual heaviness, and reserved for a fringe of pseudo-intellectuals, are perfectly abstract and cannot be effectively applied to communities that know nothing about their mechanics. These intrusions must be compensated for, by starting from the sum of conventions and aspirations.

This republican culture will focus on and demonstrate the full awareness that individuals and population groups have rights and obligations towards the community, and their willingness to effectively translate this full awareness into all their public actions.

2 Ensuring the separation of powers and preventing the state from being taken hostage

The requirement to separate the executive, legislative and judicial branches remains fundamental and crucial. Everyone must be guaranteed a space for autonomy. "Power must check power"[8]. It must be strengthened at all costs in the sense of better ensuring the balance between the components and, above all, guaranteeing the multipolar nature of society.

8 Montesquieu, On the Spirit of the Laws, 1748

The mode of appointment to the constituent bodies of these three powers must differ and to ensure and avoid that one community or group of communities takes over all the powers as is happening in many countries at the moment. Avoiding communitarianism in governance would reflect such an approach. As much as the devolution of executive power will be based on government by majority rule, the mode of appointment at the level of the legislative assemblies and in the courts must be primarily concerned with guaranteeing the balance between the communities and ensuring that they are able to effectively control the action of the governors. Ensure that whoever wins the elections does not grab everything.

3 Bury the repressive state and banish abuse of power

This requires the inversion of certain perceptions according to which: the state is above everything, the state has a monopoly on legitimate violence, etc., which also have their extension in the rulers/and officials are above everything.

The importation of the Western model onto African societies by the colonialists who ruled, but also by the post-independence African elites who inherited and adopted it, is the cause of this major difficulty. We must therefore get rid of it, because it has a strong nefarious effect on our societies and is expressed by social unrest resulting in anarchy.

In doing so, an African democracy would address and transcend these difficulties. A system must therefore be established for our societies, taking into account the links between individuals and communities.

The establishment of local governance

1 The return of administration to society for efficiency purposes

From the gap between institutional and social dynamics, the wish is the necessary reintegration of the administration into society.

Our perspective of reform, based on principles of plurality, difference and autonomy, presupposes that the state apparatus, especially its means of intervention, should follow the same contours, in terms of values and the way societies are organised.

This return of the administration to society should result in greater proximity of public services, greater attention to the needs of the population, the freeing up of spaces for initiatives and decision-making for the benefit of the population, resulting in new opportunities and capacities for wealth creation and, finally, greater social cohesion.

By acquiring legitimacy, a social base and recognised social utility, public action will be able to lead the transformations necessary for society to flourish.

2 Decentralisation and/or devolution of public services and resources

This spirit pursues the objective of reforming the administration.

As long as the administration reintegrates society, as long as local authorities exercise more responsibility in the management of local public affairs through advanced decentralisation, it is necessary for the State to follow this dynamic, by devolving its services and developing appropriate responses to the new requirements of public service.

In order to be real and effective, this devolution must consist of effective and extensive responsibilities granted to decentralised structures, commensurate with the nature of the demands made on them by local authorities.

The other condition for the viability of decentralised structures is the devolution of budgetary resources. Resources should be managed in locations as close as possible to their use. Isn't money the crux of the matter?

Investment in people

1 Investing in young people

The vector of change that is youth has a considerable role to play in Africa's future[9]. In order to plan for the future, their technical capacity and citizen participation must be strengthened.

Increasing the technical capacity of young people requires a thorough review of the education system in our countries. The school, which has long since left

9 According to the UNFPA report in 2017, (United Nations Population Fund in West and Central Africa): under 25s already represent 64% of the population.

society, due to the extraversion of the state, must now reintegrate the communities. Education cannot continue to be disconnected from the realities of the living environment.

Also, citizen youth movements must be instigated and fostered. Yes, the commitment of young people. Maintaining such a dynamic requires spaces for participation in the management of public affairs that must be open to them. This must be supported by a mechanism that gives them legitimacy and legality.

It is therefore the responsibility of the state and the local authorities to provide support to youth organisations insofar as they correspond to a social demand and offer services recognised as being of public utility.

2 Establishing a permanent dialogue

Societies that possess a dialogue mechanism are the most stable and sustainable.

For societies engaged in a process of rebuilding the state on a plural basis, the development of concertation capacities is crucial. This is the instrument through which adjustments between often contradictory and divergent interests are made. It is also the most appropriate way to develop perspectives and agree on anchor projects for social transformation and development.

This capacity for consultation must concern both *PEOPLE* and organisations. At the human level, capacity-building actions in the conduct of negotiations must target leaders and all officials whose functions necessarily lead them to take decisions that involve the population. Let the spirit of dialogue prevail over all management. For *ORGANISATIONS*, consultation frameworks will be created or encouraged, wherever the nature of the problems dealt with and/or the diversity of the actors requires it.

This participation of all in the management of the common good is a manifestation of legitimate governance, or the effectiveness of the state[10]; it is a guarantee of stability and development.

10 Steffen G. Schneider, "The legitimacy of political systems, the public space and the media: a comparative study of legitimation discourses in Germany, the United States, Great Britain and Switzerland" Politiques et Sociétés, vol.27, no.2, 2008, p.105–136

The Sahel's rejection of France: a thousand and one reasons!

Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan*

The recent blocking of a French military convoy in Burkina and Niger by young villagers dramatically illustrates the extent of the massive rejection of France in the Sahel (the images went viral on social media in Africa, generating widespread enthusiasm). Many other examples can be mentioned, such as the joint declaration of four of the main trade union organisations in Niger naming France as the main enemy. Such animosity may surprise public opinion in France, which has just increased its development aid, and reduced the extent of its military intervention, which is nonetheless considered necessary by all the governments in the region.

And yet, there are multiple factors that explain this. Although there may not be a thousand reasons as our title suggests, there are many and they are convergent. In our opinion, they arise from two different dimensions. A first set of reasons is due to historical causes, from the both the recent and the more distant past, based for the most part on attested facts, about which a rational "anti-French" argument can be developed. This must be taken into consideration.

A second set of causes is of a completely different order, as it is based on conspiracy narratives, out of touch with contemporary realities, but which appear credible to many and are the subject of intense dissemination through rumour and social media. The convergence of these two registers is explosive, as current events show. But to gain a good grasp of this phenomenon, we must first unravel one by one its many components.

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France's heavy legacy in Africa

Colonialism remains, of course, the main accusation against France for the vast majority of citizens of the African countries which were subjected to French rule. From a chronological point of view, this is the first charge (although the Atlantic slave trade, which enriched the West and partly contributed to enabling the industrial revolution, has not left the collective memory – unlike the slave trade to Arab countries, which is more easily ignored), and it is also the first in terms of its gravity: the violence of the conquest (for example, in Niger, the massacres of the Voulet-Chanoine column) as well as the despotism of colonial governance (the indigénat status, forced labour, requisitioning of agricultural produce, land grabbing, compulsory conscription and use as cannon fodder in the two world wars) are not easily forgotten, for the accounts of this painful period have not yet been settled.

A work of remembrance is required regarding the French colonisation of Black Africa, as it has begun to be carried out for the Algerian war. In a phase known as neo-colonialism, in the former French colonies, the regimes born with independence took over directly from the colonisers with the help and often under the supervision of the latter. The exceptions were Guinea - which quickly became a terrible dictatorship – and Mali – where Modibo Keita was quickly swept away.

The new nations were therefore not able to free themselves from this heavy past (whereas countries like Ghana or Tanzania, thanks to the historical role of a Nkrumah or a Nyerere, have been much more successful). Or again there is the case of Niger where this phrase from the national anthem, composed by a Frenchman (!), has been sung boisterously for 60 years: "Let us be proud and grateful/for our new freedom!" A process of change has only been underway for one year!

The colonial legacy still weighs heavily today throughout French-speaking Africa, including on the younger generations who did not experience this period: demonstrations by high school and university students have frequently targeted French symbols for decades.

Indeed, after independence, on many occasions the colonial legacy surfaced again, for example in relation to the shameful treatment of African veterans of the Second World War and of France's colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria

(where they were also sent to the front line) – pensions reduced to ridiculous levels and blocked – or the difficulties (and humiliations) encountered by nationals of former French colonies when trying to obtain visas for France (including for study).

Of course, it is above all Françafrique, which has reigned since the 1960s and which has not totally disappeared (Bolloré or Total come to mind), that has continually revived anti-colonial resentment, even though it is far less strident today than it used to be. The long and intense mingling of racketeering and corruption, support for dictators, military interventions for the benefit of protégés, has been devastating. Public opinion has often suspected (sometimes wrongly, but one only lends to the rich) France's hand in a number of coups (against Sankara in Burkina Faso, against Diori Hamani in Niger, against Grunitzky in Togo, etc.).

Even though France has become a secondary economic (and sometimes even political) partner, and is no longer capable at all of calling the shots in its former colonies, its last military interventions on the continent, well before the breakthrough of jihadism, were very strongly criticized, both in Côte d'Ivoire and in Libya. The war against Gaddafi is in fact one of the major causes of the current Sahel crisis. Lastly, there is the CFA franc, which, if only on a symbolic level, and without delving into the economists' discourse on its negative effects, reminds us of the sad past of the French occupation (could we imagine that after the liberation of France the official currency would be called the "mark"?)

To this picture must be added the arrogance mixed with paternalism that has often characterised French leaders, from Giscard d'Estaing's support for his "cousin" Bokassa, or Balladur's unilateral decision to devalue the CFA franc, down to Sarkozy's speech in Dakar on an Africa that has never entered history.

These very bad habits cannot be said to have been broken by Macron's statements and decisions. On the one hand, he did admit, with some courage for a politician, that colonisation was a crime against humanity, and he finally started to return some of the African art pillaged under colonialism. On the other hand, he decided one fine morning and almost single-handedly (admittedly with Ouattara to some extent) to replace the CFA franc with the eco without taking into account the ongoing process initiated by the African heads of state; he decreed that Algeria had no history prior to the French conquest, and he summoned the African heads of state to Pau one day, while telling them on another

day to stay at home, for a pseudo France-Africa summit taking place without them.

Lastly, we must take into account a phenomenon that is not only French, but to which France contributes: the issue of aid dependency (development aid as well as humanitarian aid). *"The hand that gives is always above the hand that receives"*: this frequently quoted maxim reflects the sense of humiliation that is part of the unequal relationship between the donors of aid and those who receive it. The widespread public celebration of "partnership" today scarcely hides the extent to which this term does not reflect the reality of aid, where it is always the Northern partners who make the important decisions, impose their conditions, disseminate their ideas and programmes, and lecture in morality.

The paradox here is that France is considered to be a major contributor to this dependence, even though direct aid from France has become relatively weak, and is less appreciated than aid from other European countries such as Germany or Switzerland, which are more structuring and more sustained (these two countries provide support that is targeted to a sector, long-term, more flexible and adaptable).

So far we have listed a whole series of historical facts, from the remote and recent past, which "burden" in some way the current relations between France and the African countries it formerly colonised. But the specificities of each country must also be taken into account.

Colonial and sometimes post-colonial memory is more or less alive and exacerbated depending on the case: the massacre of the Thiaroye riflemen in Senegal, the bloody repression in 1947 in Madagascar, the war against the Union of the Peoples of Cameroon (UPC) and the liquidation of its leaders are specific traumas, supplementary in a way, the memory of which feeds resentment against France all the more since these events are almost ignored at the official level.

We would like to highlight a much more recent event, which plays a major role in the current crisis in Mali: the question of Kidal. While Malian opinion had welcomed the French army's Serval operation to prevent the descent of jihadists into the South, and then to liberate northern Mali, the French refusal to let the Malian army enter Kidal, thus handing the town over to the Tuareg independence fighters, marked a complete reversal of opinion.

The French were seen as hostile to Mali's unity and sovereignty, and their

former complacency towards the Tuareg rebellions came back up to the surface. As a result, French military intervention in a new form (Barkhane) has become suspect for many Malians, especially since Barkhane has functioned largely as an enclave, without systematically involving the Malian army (which is considered, not without reason, as unreliable).

From this accumulation of historical data in which France played particularly negative roles emerges a double feeling of humiliation (which implies a desire for revenge) and distrust (which calls into question all the "good intentions" of the French). This dual sentiment has a strong emotional dimension, but it is rooted in indisputable facts and is somehow legitimised by all these realities we have mentioned. This emotional dimension quickly explodes when the slightest incident serves as a spark: blocking a French military convoy both satisfies the desire for revenge and expresses the historically founded mistrust against the French army.

Conspiracy theories and the rejection of France

It is on this factual basis, which is in a way incontrovertible, that the second register of causes of the massive rejection of France comes into play, a register that moves away from historical truths and is situated in the imaginary, in the ideological, in confabulation, but it acquires credibility by "surfing", as it were, on the register of historical truths and on the humiliation and mistrust that result from them, to the point where, very often, these two registers become indistinguishably entangled in "anti-French" discourse.

The case of the CFA franc is emblematic: proven historical aspects (it is indeed a delegation of sovereignty to France, and a colonial legacy) and complex economic debates on the advantages and disadvantages (which vary from country to country) of a strong currency pegged to the euro coexist alongside widespread erroneous assertions (France is said to have become richer thanks to the foreign exchange reserves of the African countries blocked at the Banque de France). The three conspiracy theories we will discuss are extremely widespread, in all the countries of the Sahel and even beyond, and among different layers of the population. They can also be combined.

The first conspiracy theory considers that French intervention has a hidden

agenda: to grab the (supposed) immense natural resources of the Sahel. French geopolitical motivations (blocking the jihadist advance, avoiding the collapse of the Sahelian states, curbing migration) are not taken seriously. On the other hand, hidden or potential natural resources are clearly overestimated in this narrative, and the current constraints of raw material exploitation and market functioning are ignored. The nostalgia or return to the Marxism and anti-imperialism of the 1960s–70s also feeds this theory: politics is seen as always serving the disguised interests of the capitalist economy, even in its contemporary neo-liberal version.

A second conspiracy theory is often grafted onto the first. It is far less credible, but still widespread. The French are allegedly colluding with the jihadists to create regional instability that would justify their military intervention. The fact that they have not prevented the spread of jihadism despite their considerable resources and firepower is cited as proof of this complicity. It is this conspiracy theory that has been widely invoked by the rural protesters who have blocked the French convoy in recent days.

The third conspiracy theory is of a different order, and refers to the religious domain. The French are "Cafres" (pagans) who are participating in the new Christian crusade against Islam, especially the "true Islam" reformed by the Salafists. This theory resonates with the latter.

Conspiracy theories are unique in that they spread by themselves, like an oil spill, whether in the very old and still current form of "rumours" or in the very new form of social media, which play a major role in this case. Videos, photos and voice messages illustrate and validate these theories, as they circulate throughout Africa and the African diaspora.

However, the role of political or religious entrepreneurs who contribute to, use or manipulate this dissemination should not be underestimated. The extent of anti-French sentiment opens up opportunities for politicians, as can be seen particularly in Mali. Religious factions, sometimes politicians as well, also make use of this. Jihadists, on the other hand, fuel the crusade theory. Some external actors (especially Russia, but also Turkey) are also fanning the flames (of a fire they did not start, but which they are taking advantage of).

It is particularly difficult today in Africa to convince someone to abandon a conspiracy theory, especially since behind it there is always the register of inescapable historical truths, which justify a deep mistrust of the actions of French

officials and lend a very strong emotional dimension to the debate. This shows the extent to which a profound change of attitude in French policy is necessary, and not just a cosmetic or semantic one, if the French want to truly establish relations between France and Africa on new foundations.

Acknowledge the crimes of colonisation, make a clear break with Françafrique and what remains of it, put an end to condescension, arrogance, injunctions and unilateral decisions, replace advice with listening, move from standardised, formatted and volatile aid to more humble, reliable, sustainable and flexible support, no more accepting in some what is condemned in others, no more lectures in morality and republicanism that are often contradicted by the practices of many French politicians, simply allow African students to continue their studies in France, all of this is basically quite simple, but it is no small matter.

We have a long way to go: meeting a dozen young Africans in front of the cameras in the hyper-personalised register that Macron is so fond of, renaming development aid to remove the word "aid" and the word "development", episodically consulting African elites in the diaspora ... Seen from Africa, these presidential innovations look quite pathetic!

After the coups in Burkina Faso and Mali

Helmut Asche, Maria Grosz-Ngaté,
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On Sunday 23 January 2022 a fourth country in the Sahel region experienced a military coup within the space of nine months: Burkina Faso. It was preceded by those of Chad, Guinea and Mali in Central Africa. In the first coup in Chad, two members of the military – father and son – succeeded each other in a military dictatorship. Neither the African Union nor France raised any objections. On the other hand, after elections were postponed for five years, the military junta in Mali, and with it the entire country, were subjected to radical sanctions by the West African community ECOWAS and the EU: border closures, air traffic shut down, payments from the West African central bank cut off – comparable in scope to cutting off the SWIFT money transfer system. Sanctions may be formally legitimate in the context of an alliance with legally binding norms, but for several reasons they are certainly not politically smart, as they are counterproductive immediately and lead nowhere in the long term. This manifests itself directly in strong "patriotic" reactions, directed against ECOWAS and especially against France, in many sectors of the population of Mali and the surrounding countries.

In substance, the approach of ECOWAS is understandable. Among the African regional organisations, it has been the most successful in ending civil wars and calling to order military leaders or presidents who would not step down - ECOWAS has worked on peacekeeping and conflict resolution. In recent years, however, the problems are threatening to overtake it. This is the reason for ECOWAS' severe sanctions against the Malian leadership. But many people in

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the Sahel see them as invasive and imposed by the former colonial power, France. There is a risk that sanctions will have an effect opposite to the one they were intended for. After all, the coup in Burkina Faso took place despite the sanctions against Mali, which were supposed to act as a deterrent.

For a better grasp of the situation, a brief explanation of the ongoing crises in the Sahel is required.

The crises in the Western Sahel countries did not originate initially from the advance of Islamist terrorism, they were only reinforced by it. What is more critical in all the countries concerned is the prolonged personal enrichment of the political elites and their ignorance of the needs of the majority of the population. Added to this is the fact that, even with international support, they have not been able to stem the proliferation of armed groups and guarantee even a semblance of security for the population. According to official figures, there are now at least 1.6 million internally displaced persons in Burkina Faso alone. If coups demonstrate anything, it is the extent to which the causes of crises are internal, even though the circumstances may differ from country to country. The international community – including Germany – must now take decisions on two levels. The first is about sanctions and the purpose of the constraints associated with them; the other is about military aid – the mandates of MINUSMA and EUTM.

Elections, then what?

By the look of things, it is all about elections. The Bamako junta was under international pressure to hold elections in February 2022 and then withdraw. The lowest common denominator of the international partners, including in Berlin, was: we insist on quick elections and "reforms".

This demand was totally unrealistic from the start. Instead, Mali's military government began by trying to curb corruption and then organised a series of central and decentralised political consultations. The outcome was that the general elections had to be postponed and that- in the meantime – state reform had to be undertaken. The fact that the junta decided on a five-year postponement, that the results of the consultations have so far not been published, and that only a timetable has been promised so far, is open to criticism, but does

not change the fact that in this situation inclusive consultations for stabilisation from within are more useful than sanctions from outside.

In Burkina Faso, free elections were held in 2020 – at least in the part of the country where it was possible to vote. They did not solve any problems. Insisting on "quick" elections – whether in Libya, Mali or Sudan – only makes sense if people can see clear proposals on fundamental issues concerning the direction the country is taking and if they literally have a choice. This is hardly ever the case, it is essentially a question of continuing the same policy with the same protagonists or a slight exchange of protagonists.

Behind the demand for elections and reforms lies a conception of the state that is largely unsuited to the situation. The West likes to talk about "fragile states" in Africa that should be reformed. Apart from the fact that this discourse systematically ignores the external reasons for the political and economic fragility, European policy is partly responsible for (trade, climate change, corruption), internally, these countries are not simply fragile. The colonial powers in the past simply transposed relevant central government systems which were perceived as illegitimate by many citizens. These no longer function, as they have decayed. The authorities in the countries concerned are effectively unable to act in this respect, which is why appeals from the outside no longer find a target: whether in Mali or, before that, in Somalia or Libya, asking the civilian or military "elites" to undertake democratic reforms and stabilise weak institutions with Western aid shows a lack of realism. West African observers see the increase in military coups in recent times as a very worrying trend, but attribute it mainly to the population's disillusionment with regard to their governments. It is therefore important not to take the easy way out: in addition to formal legitimacy through elections, any government above all needs legitimacy through results, which translate into improved living conditions for the population.

The communities in the Sahel clearly need to be rebuilt from the bottom up, in a reverse cascade of local, regional and central negotiations. As the Somaliland experience showed successfully, they need to develop, even before the classical institutions, a new common understanding of the State – a new social contract, a discourse of peaceful cohabitation within the community. This is precisely the path that civil societies in Mali and Burkina Faso seem to be taking – to negotiate with armed groups that are not all "external" enemies who ride

in on motorbikes from the vast empty spaces of the desert. The West should support societies in this direction, but with a precise sense of measure and with the points of support desired, and not with those that derive from political slogans in Paris, Brussels or Berlin.

Should military aid be continued?

These long-term efforts will not eliminate the dangerous Islamist threat in the Sahel. The second level of decision-making therefore concerns the continuation of MINUSMA, EUTM and EUCAP, with the participation of Germany.

Let us make it clear from the outset that the presence of Russian mercenaries or "instructors" in Mali or elsewhere in Africa is more than a political and humanitarian inconvenience, but is not in itself a sufficient reason to take a decision on the matter – i.e. to withdraw troops.

MINUSMA and EU missions have been trying to help the countries of the central Sahel region stabilise their security situation and train their troops since 2012. They have clearly not succeeded. For the past two years, a working group from the VAD has fundamentally criticised the existing policies and approaches and has also dismantled the allegedly successful nexus between development and security dependent on foreign aid in these countries.

Our analysis rules out welcoming the military coup plotters as saviours from the outset, although a large part of the population in all three countries, Guinea, Mali and Burkina, seems to do so. One would hope that elements of the military would have taken power, following the legendary example of the officer Thomas Sankara or the Ghanaian air force lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in the 1980s, and that they would be able to initiate progressive politics, i.e., among other things, to expand the boundaries of the arena of established political actors, to allow villagers, women, and young people to take political initiatives and thus embark on the path of a sustainable democracy. None of this is at all certain. The new holders of power will have to be judged on their actions. The road to a working democracy and even to stabilisation is a long one, and every step in this direction must be supported all the more.

The short-term requirements, already summarised by our group of Africanist researchers, are therefore clear. In the purely military realm, they imply that

the armed forces now in power in Bamako, Ouagadougou (and Ndjamena) are prepared in the short term to reform the institutions, make military budgets transparent and end the culture of impunity for violence against their own populations.

Or, as Gilles Yabi of the West African think tank Wathi puts it: *"We must be realistic: there will be no renewal of the political, military or administrative elites in the short term. But this has to change a little, and let us at least put an end to the haphazard governance of the defence and security sector. In short, stop diverting and wasting scarce resources."*

For the rest, what has been said above remains valid:as has just been the case in Mali, civil society must be guaranteed the policy space to conduct the necessary national dialogue at all levels without restrictions (including freedom of the press and social media), to define its own priorities and implement them. We have called this the "reversal of the actors' perspective" – unlike what is happening now, it is the actors inside the countries who have to decide. The guarantee of security for this can also be given in the short term and formulated in concrete terms. It should determine the decisions of the German Federal Parliament regarding mandates for the German army in May 2022.

Finally, the federal government and parliament must decide whether the failure of the policy in the Sahel will finally prompt them to adopt a political strategy that does not follow in France's footsteps, i.e. one that clearly distances itself from the discourse on terrorism in Africa written in Paris and the bad decisions taken in this context. Unfortunately, this has not seemed possible so far. Even the coalition agreement of the new government has only a meagre paragraph on Africa. Federal governments have always subordinated their Africa policy to the greater good of the "Berlin-Paris axis" or to Anglo-Saxon interests – depending on the sphere of influence. But if what VAD Africanists, including our colleagues in the Sahel, have predicted as the consequence of misguided policies under French hegemony comes to pass – the collapse of the bulwarks that prevent the Islamist threat from infiltrating to the West African coast – then it is time to think and decide independently in Berlin. It would then be essential to know whether, despite the "French dilemma", political Berlin is prepared to think fundamentally differently or at least to accept policy advice outside the box.

In conclusion, no one – neither politicians nor representatives of civil society

– can today guarantee that the proposals outlined will really bring a political solution to the countries concerned. What is certain, however, is the other side of the coin: the continuation of the current policy will lead to nothing or at least to nothing good.

Responsibility and resilience

The people of Cameroon faced with the COVID-19 pandemic

Flaubert Djateng*

Zenü Network could not have been unmoved by the irruption of Covid-19 into the world. Our organization's vision is of a society in which every citizen contributes to living together. Network members invested efforts in communicating about the pandemic, registering on specialised websites to obtain the right information. Seeking out the right contacts to have clear explanations. What can we say about this pandemic today? What effects has it had on our country and what transformations has it brought about?

Together with Bread for the World, CAMNAFAW (Cameroon National Planning Association for Family Welfare) and the Ministry of Youth, the mobilisation first involved around 50 students who raised awareness about wearing masks and barrier measures to more than 1,700 people. Then with PROCIVIS (Active Citizenship Strengthening Programme), it was the turn of the bus and moto-taxi drivers. The idea was to ask them to wear a mask and to require passengers to do the same. This work allowed us to observe the resilience factors within Cameroon society on the one hand, and on the other hand to see the divisions that can be caused when there is a breakdown of trust between the public authorities and the population. Rallying and educating young people and citizens around a joint action is not easy nowadays. There is no longer trust in adults and government officials who have perverted the system of governance. How can we trust people who have been implicated in the misappropriation of Covid funds destined for the care of the population? The report published by the Superior State Control in February 2022 mentions numerous cases of the embezzlement of funds supposed to be used to fight Covid 19. It

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can be noted that while the world was worried and trying to cope with the pandemic, our leaders were distinguishing themselves through feats of irresponsibility and contempt for the suffering of the population:

- Embezzlement of funds, 23 ministerial departments implicated in the misappropriation of 180 billion CFA francs in funds for the special national solidarity fund to combat the coronavirus.
- Barrier measures were taken and lifted without any real justification; the lifting of measures relating to the number of passengers on public transport and the obligation to wear a mask were seen as the end of the pandemic.
- Quarantines which end in farce: travellers taken to requisitioned hotels for quarantine and later found with prostitutes.
- Non-respect of measures by the authorities, the mourning of high-ranking state officials and businessmen organised in disregard of the barrier measures.
- Scamming patients in hospitals, poorly paid doctors taking advantage of the suffering of the patients to fill their pockets.
- Mafia racketeering around the corpses of those who died from Covid, families deprived of the bodies of their loved ones and asked to pay huge sums of money for the burial.
- Many hand washing facilities in public places, but without a regular supply of water. The facility is a façade to show that the message has been received and that an entity or a person has taken responsibility for providing the device.

There is a crisis of confidence between the young generation and the political and economic elite of Cameroon. The elders reproach young people for their loose ways and for disrespecting ancestral values, while the young criticise the elders for the problems of governance that lead to corrupt societies and prevent them from being role models for them. All this happened and nobody was sanctioned. No ministers resigned, despite the damning report of the Superior State Control.

Beyond the young generation, these behaviours profoundly changed the attitude of the general population towards Covid 19. To believe or not to believe? Should you have the vaccination or not? Individual responsibility and collective responsibility for health, who takes care of it and how? It was a moment of great uncertainty. The effects of rumours and fake news via social media in particular became widespread and influenced people's minds and hearts.

A major debate opened up around vaccination. On the one hand, there are those who dismiss the idea of vaccination completely; on the other hand, there are those who are convinced it is necessary to be vaccinated and finally, there are those who do it out of necessity, in order to be able to travel or go to work. Among the factors that reinforce distrust, in addition to the diminished credibility of the leaders, is the quality of information. Learning that vaccination does not prevent you from catching the virus and that a vaccinated person can carry and transmit the virus has put people off being vaccinated altogether. The pandemic has also given rise to conspiracy theories to the effect that Westerners have organised themselves to wipe black people off the face of the earth. Travellers from the West were almost all stigmatised. In a society where an elite has seized all the advantages at the expense of the poor, low purchasing power and poverty unfortunately mean that minds and hearts are open to theories about foreigners coming to exploit or even eliminate nationals. In the villages, those coming from the cities were considered to be the carriers of the virus and had to be isolated.

The numerous vaccination campaigns and the requirement for border testing on entry and exit were seen by many as an excuse to justify spending rather than as services to the population to reduce the spread and effects of the pandemic. Staff assigned to the testing units complained about the non-payment of mission expenses and other allowances. This situation led to less rigorous compliance with standards and there are many testimonies reporting that with money, you can buy any results or certificates you like. For example, travellers who wanted to extend a trip could obtain positive test results to justify to their employer that the extra days were quarantine days.

In such a context, vaccination is no longer considered an effective means to fight the pandemic. According to Ministry of Health figures, 4 % of the population had at least one dose and only 3 % had a fully vaccinated status by 9 March 2022. People prefer to rely on local products that boost immunity and

prevent lung infections. Potions and infusions made from natural plants have flourished. Each family has a potion or infusion that they buy or make themselves and they all consume it.

Funeral services have been the site of major outbreaks of infection. The large number of people in attendance, creating crowded conditions, the numerous choirs singing, the faithful singing during improvised religious services, the numerous speeches and testimonies with the shared use of microphones which can be vectors of contamination, are all elements which can explain the large numbers of deaths recorded just after having attended a funeral. Although most of the deceased had co-morbidities due to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, etc.

However, the presence of the virus has transformed Cameroon society. We have seen the emergence of collective behaviours that are useful for protecting oneself and other people. For months, children have been the ones to impose the use of gel in households. As soon as a stranger showed up, they would run and fetch the bottle of hand sanitizer and immediately apply it with a smile and an explanation of why. In urban households, it was observed that members showered at least twice a day: when leaving the house and when returning home. Clothes were then immediately removed and soaked in water with detergent, shoes were left outside and it was forbidden to greet or touch a person before showering. The children had to adapt and no longer touch their parents when they came home, a radical change, with an impact on the psychological well-being of the children. This all took place very quickly. Hand washing became systematic and regular.

On another level – as mentioned above – local researchers became involved in the development of drugs to boost immunity and also to cure Covid. Natural medicine products based on medicinal plants appeared and have become popular, because they are used by a great many people. On 8 July 2021 Malachie Manaouda, Cameroon's Minister of Public Health, officially authorised for a period of three years the local commercialisation of four enhanced traditional medicines to combat Covid-19. These are Adsak Covid/Elixir Covid, produced by the Archbishop of Douala, Monseigneur Samuel Kleda; Corocur powder by Euloge Yagnigni; Palubek's by Christine Bekono and Soudicov Plus by Imam Modibo. Another product not subject to Ministry approval, Ngul be Tara, has been widely consumed for its ability to boost the immune system.

Nor has civil society been idle; Zenü Network and its associative partners scoured villages, bus stations and market places to raise awareness about wearing masks and encourage people to be vaccinated. As of April 2021, the West Cameroon region had an official number of 1,410 cases of Covid-19, with nearly 1,290 cases cured and 68 official deaths. Almost 12,361 people were reached, 37,600 masks and 3,617 hand sanitizer gels distributed; 1,500 leaflets were handed out and more than 1,000 posters put up in 10 months of presence throughout the West Cameroon region. At first it was not easy, the agents were sarcastically referred to as "corona" or "money eaters". Some people took their presence in the village as a pretext for public officials to justify the misappropriation of money. They had to demonstrate in several ways that they were from civil society to gain the attention of people for a minute. Then slowly, even very slowly, people started wearing the masks and taking them for their families. The announcement of the discovery of the Delta variant in South Africa caused something of a panic and there was a rush to buy masks. The work of civil society, even if it did not lead to the barrier measures being adopted, nonetheless reinforced the reality of the existence of the disease in people's minds and encouraged families to take precautions. Almost all of them report regularly taking hot drinks and herbal potions to protect themselves.

Observation of Cameroon society during the pandemic brought to light some malfunctions that already existed but were difficult to measure. The irresponsibility in the upper echelons of the state is glaring. There is a corrupt elite that is only interested in enriching itself. On another level, the figures are still alarming at the international level, but the average Cameroonian is generally no longer distressed by the pandemic. There have certainly been deaths, but not as many as initially announced. This situation also justifies the carelessness concerning barrier measures and especially regarding the wearing of masks. For the Cameroonian, Covid-19 is a disease like any other, one can die from it and it is also possible to be treated and cured.

The citizens amply demonstrated that they are able to act responsibly at a family level and resist the pandemic. But without reliable information and with no trust in the relevant administrative and medical authorities, there is a great risk of people going astray onto risky terrain.

At the root of covido-scepticism, the ping-pong of politicians and scientists

Ulimwengu Biregeya Bernardin*

Since time immemorial, the world has experienced diseases, some of which affect only a few individuals or a few places, while others affect a larger number of people in a variety of geographical areas. And behind each of the diseases, a theological or metaphysical explanation is sometimes the only, if not the preferential recourse of citizens to justify the evil. While some modern societies claim to have reached the positive stage, as Auguste Comte would say, contemporaries are not immune to recourse to the metaphysical or even the theological, which identifies the causes of the occurrence of phenomena elsewhere than in nature itself.

This is what is happening at this time of Covid-19, with hesitations and refusals of the recommendations formulated by the competent authorities to mitigate the impact of this 21st century disease. With this modest reflection, we try to understand how, despite the obvious danger of the multidimensional consequences of the coronavirus, citizens and entire societies can doubt the reality of this disease, even to the point of thinking that the proposed solutions hardly concern them, or are aimed at annihilating them.

The origins of the issue

After the beginning was the disease, and the disease became the lot of the human being, but the human did everything to prevent and cure it. However,

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sometimes, in spite of it all, they end up falling victim to it in one way or another. As a matter of self-preservation, humans take care to do everything possible to regenerate themselves and thus prolong their vital longevity as much as possible.

When someone's house catches fire, it is natural for them to rely on any kind of solution to save themselves and, as far as possible, to grab hold of some valuable object to take with them. Therefore, it is inconceivable to pretend to understand the attitude of someone whose house is on fire, but who at the same time does not want to be offered an exit route to extinguish the flames and avoid as much as possible the perishing of goods.

Unless real questions are asked and explored, it is possible to describe the person concerned as not very rational, when perhaps all the conditions are there for them to be doubtful and reluctant, or to have little confidence in what is being proposed. In this case, they may have assumed that the proposal in question was against their interests.

In fact, when Covid-19 came along and the great powers accused each other, especially America and China, each believing that the disease was caused by the other to bring down the rival economy, people living in economically weak countries under tutelage (especially those in the South) witnessed this game, which led them to believe that it was a disease with a political-strategic origin, and therefore a kind of chemical weapon similar to those already in vogue among the world's powerful. All the psychological ingredients were there for conspiracy speculation.

Until recently, experts went to Wuhan, the famous city where the pandemic is believed to have originated, to investigate the origin of Covid-19. Given that these developed nations are each looking for the sorcerer in the other's camp, is it any wonder that the poor countries are taking this so-called ìbackwardî approach, believing that it is the rich who are blaming them in application of Malthusianism?

Remember that this theory states that "to improve the lot of the poor, the proportional number of births must be reduced"[1] to produce a constant increase in population – really useful![2]. Some of the talk by the world's vaccine benefactors, notably Bill and Belinda Gates, about what was happening in African

1 T.R. Malthus, Essay on the Principle of Population, Volume 2, Paris, Flammarion, 1992, p.373.
2 T.R. Malthus, Essay on the Principle of Population. op.cit, p. 375.

countries where dead bodies were supposedly littering the streets, suggested that it was thought that Africa would be hit harder than other continents.

Indeed, the weakness of the health care system and the economy, not to mention politics on life support itself, could only make this probability obvious. In addition to this, there is talk of the fear expressed by these same powerful people about the probable danger of too many people in Africa, as if there were one too many people in this place, whereas in reality the problem is more organisational and strategic.

Such as the words of the French President, which inflamed some Africans who did not understand that a European president had the audacity to give lessons in the management of the marital bed of poor Africans, to whom this politician offers a "successful demographic transition". This is what makes Zbigniew Brzeziński say, for example, that "20% of the population is enough to run the system, 80% are useless mouths"![3]. From this point of view, a pandemic would serve to eradicate the mouths deemed "surplus", in order to keep only the "strictly useful" population.

For proponents of this position, Africa needs much more political and economic stability, in short, positive peace involving a combination of a high degree of social equity coupled with minimal violence, rather than population regulation. Also, based on past experience with epidemics, one recalls epidemics that decimated the Amerindians, which came from caravans of Westerners, some believe that the powerful maintain strategies to decimate populations other than their own.

Claire Sèverac points out that the conspiracy system has taken care to test "the psychological reactions of the people through films, by way of science fiction, a future that furiously resembles the programme concocted in the oligarchic cenacles."[4] A number of fictions that were once edited and made available to the public now seem to be realised through everyday events. Was it a question of simulation, forecasting or pure play?

One conspiracy theory opinion refers to the ID2020 Agenda, the global programme of digital identification through the implementation of the RFID chip.

3 Zbigniew Brzeziński quoted by Claire Séverac, La guerre secrËte...op.cit., p.17.

4 Claire SÈverac, La guerre secrËte contre les peuples (Ne leur pardonnez pas ; ils savent ce qu'ils font) [The secret war against the people (Do not forgive them; they know what they are doing)], s.l., …lie et Mado/Kontre Kulture, 2015, p.11.

This is apparently aimed at facilitating remote control, and therefore, the remote hyper-subordination of the world's population. After that, a simple insubordination will be enough to be deactivated from the system. Furthermore, reading various CIA reports on what the world would look like in 2020, 2025 and 2035, predictions were made that a new pandemic would emerge by means of the geographical distribution of pathogens. This was also simulated by 18 October 2019, going so far as to estimate that a widespread pandemic would kill 65 million people after 18 months.[5] It should be noted that in reality these prospective and therefore futuristic studies aim to enlighten decision-makers as to the future to be prepared for their nations.

It should also be noted that some scholars estimate that by 2050, 86% of the world's population will reside in currently developing countries, and that Europe's population is likely to be smaller than Nigeria's[6]. It is this fear that is at the root of the violence of the rich[7] who, out of fear of the future, would physically, mentally and economically attack the poor.

But should we be content with this conspiracy view and ignore all preventive measures against the danger of possible contamination? This is the dangerous view that some people unfortunately take, at the risk of only understanding later, when the damage is irreparable. The truth is that the danger is real, although perhaps the preventive measures seem too rigorous and too restrictive, to the point of raising suspicions of an exaggeration aimed at gradually bringing about decisions that crush individual liberty.

According to the sociology of illness, *"disease is a kind of event, often situated in a chain of misfortunes, which goes beyond the body and functions as a social signifier: it is the subject of discourse which always calls into question the environment in the broadest sense."* [8] Laplantine[9] considers that in each era, each society

5 Read more on this subject: CIA, The CIA Report: What will the world be like in 2020? Presented by Alexandre Adler, Translated from the American by Johan-FrÈdÈrik Hel Guedj, s.l., Robert Laffont, s.d. National Intelligence Council, The World in 2035 as Seen by the CIA and the National Intelligence Council: The Paradox of Progress, s .l., …ditions des …quateurs, 2017;

6 See Jacques Attali, Pour une Èconomie positive [For a positive Economy], Paris, Fayard, 2013, pp.41-42.

7 cf. Monique & Michel PinÁon, "La violence des riches", online interview for the programme "Regards", on www.youtube.com

8 Anne Bargès, "Anthropologie et sociologie associées au domaine de la maladie et de la médecine" [Anthropology and sociology associated with the field of disease and medicine], in Sciences humaines en médecine (Introduction aux), Ellipses, 2001, p.189. online at

9 Anne Bargès, art.cit, p. 198.

has 'its' favourite cause, notably: *fatum*, fate or plague, a disease of a sacred nature, which strikes brutally and massively; powerless populations rely on a sacred dimension for their 'salvation'; *social plagues*, 'social diseases' such as: tuberculosis, syphilis, children's diseases, alcoholism...; *witchcraft* and contamination by malice, spells; 'microbial' contagion; the *theory of degeneration* and a nervous memory.

Among the 10 worst documented pandemics[10], the *plague of Athens*, which occurred from 430 to 426 B.C. In the third century BC, a third of the population of 200,000 died; *the Antonine plague* killed nearly 10 million people between 166 and 189 in Mesopotamia and Rome; in 541 *Justinian's plague* killed approximately 25 to 100 million people, or one third of the population of the time, at a rate of 10,000 deaths per day. Constantinople lost 40% of its population. Between 1347 and 1353, the *Black Death* is estimated to have caused between 25 and 34 million victims in Europe. This plague reappeared in the second half of the 19th century, killing nearly 100 million people worldwide. *The Spanish flu* (1918–1919) killed 20–50 million worldwide; *cholera* (1926–1932) caused nearly 100,000 deaths; *Asian flu* (1956–1957) killed three million; *AIDS* (1981 to date) has already killed over 40 million; Ebola (3,481 cases, 2,299 deaths as of 11 February 2021), Covid-19 (2020 to date) had already killed more than 3 million people by 26 April 2021.

From vaccine breakthroughs to a divisive miracle

Unlike the experiences of the past, the arrival of Covid-19 has benefited from a fierce scientific struggle, culminating in the discovery of vaccines, after the therapies also led to clashes between scientists (cf. the quarrels over chloroquine or even the use of Artemisia products). Thus, the challenge was to develop several vaccines, at a world record of from 12 to 18 months. This had never happened before with other pandemics.

Some scientists acknowledge that it used to take years to develop a vaccine,

10 See Jean Salmon, "Rapport introductif", in Rostane Mehdi & Sandrine Maljean-Dubois (eds.), *La société internationale et les grandes pandémies*, Quatorzièmes rencontres internationales d'Aix-en-Provence, Colloque on 8 & 9 December 2006, Paris, éd.A.Pedone, 2007, pp. 15–16.

as microbiologist Dolla Karam Sarkis attests[11]: "The fastest time to obtain a mumps vaccine was 4 years; a polio vaccine took 7 years; a measles vaccine 9 years; a vaccine against HPV (human papillomavirus) was 15 years; a chickenpox vaccine was 34 years; and 36 years later we still do not have an AIDS vaccine."

This is probably one of the reasons for the doubt and the haggling over the current vaccine proposals. The question that easily comes to mind is that, while nonetheless acknowledging that the science has advanced at cruising speed, how is it that proposed vaccines against Covid-19 are already operational in such a short time? But even the practice of vaccination itself is open to doubt, given the trial and error regarding the age of vaccine candidates, the number of doses needed to ensure immunity, and the duration of protection provided by vaccination... A consensus has not yet been reached on all of these aspects.

As of 23 April 2021, the countries that have administered the most doses of vaccine include (top 10)[12]: The US, China, India, UK, Brazil, Germany, Turkey, France, Indonesia and Russia. At the same time, there is some inequality in access to vaccines, with developed countries taking the bulk of the vaccine supply. Curiously, on the side of the poor countries for whom some institutions advocate for equitable access to vaccines, there is a very low acceptance rate of vaccination, as conspiracy theory overrides truth and the reality of the disease.

Given the existence of other diseases that silently decimate populations - the malaria endemic in particular – which has caused 409,000 deaths out of 229 million cases in 2019, one wonders if it is out of charity that researchers and pharmaceutical companies are focusing on Covid-19 to the detriment of all the other problems that have immeasurable consequences: poverty, armed conflicts... that decimate peoples under the somewhat carefree gaze of the rich.

Reliable sources prove that there are diseases that do more harm than the coronavirus, but which the powerful keep silent or suppress as long as they do not harm their interests. This is true of any proposed treatment proposed by a poor country or that does not benefit the pharmaceutical companies. We only have to look at all the fuss that is being made about proposals from Africa or from scientists who are not supporters of *big pharma*. For example, chloroquine

11 Dolla Karam Sarkis, "Pandemics in History ...to the Coronavirus!" p.3
12 https://www.atlas-mag.net/article/vaccin-contre-le-covid-19-classement-des-pays

and the formula proposed by Professor Didier Raoult has been attacked from all sides to the extent that this treatment has been described as unscientific, when in fact it is still used to treat cases today. It is clear that this relentlessness is due to the simple fact that poor countries have the opportunity to manufacture the drug themselves without being held to ransom by the pharmaceutical companies.

More fear than harm?

While it is true that the existence of Covid-19 is incontrovertible, it is also true that some of the restrictive measures do not remotely correspond to the reality of life, especially for poor people living from hand to mouth, who are subjected to lockdown as if they were guaranteed to have everything they need. Yet even the entrepreneurs and investors themselves have difficulty keeping up with economic activities which, on a daily basis, go bankrupt, with their employees condemned to unemployment and misery, to the impossibility of paying their debts or keeping up with rent, thus sinking into depression and the loss of all hope of survival.

That is why in some parts of the world, the choice was clear, and citizens chose contamination over hunger. They found it better to carry on with life as normal rather than be deprived of food. And scientists have even theorised this by the principle of herd immunity, as opposed to the principle of collective sequestration which, while necessary, is not sufficient.

While it is dangerous but well-founded, covido-scepticism is far from helpful in dealing with the disease of the moment. Well-founded, insofar as, based on the first rule of the Cartesian method (evidence) which states that we should not trust someone who has once deceived us, the initial and even current doubts and hesitations about the value of the proposed vaccines still being developed through trial and error, which further encourages doubt. It should be noted, however, that doubt is in itself good, but doubting for the sake of doubting is dangerous because it exposes more than it saves.

The future belongs to momentary methodical doubt and not to the sceptical doubt that questions any proposal for measures to prevent and fight the coronavirus, and by ricochet, any evil annoying society. In order to keep people's

doubts and hesitations to a minimum, politicians, scientists and economic agents should harmonise their views outside of any fierce clashes of partisan interests that disorient the people. This is what will mitigate present and future scepticism, since if we don't have our own local solutions, we can simply use the ones that are available to us, as has been the case with many other vaccines that have saved us from serious illness in the past.

The Congolese and their society in the mirror of the coronavirus

Kä Mana*

As the coronavirus spreads across the world and takes over more and more territory with its decisive power and force of destruction over human lives and social institutions, I realise that it is not just an invisible enemy against which it is imperative to wage all-out war. I also believe it provides insight into the essential strengths and deep-seated fragilities of human beings and their societies. This is the angle from which I would like to take a close look at the Congolese and their society as a significant field of analysis, to look into their mirror to discern what needs to be encouraged and what needs to be changed in the anthropological and social order in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The challenges of a pandemic

Like the world as a whole, the Democratic Republic of Congo, our country, is engaged in the radical fight that humanity is waging today against the coronavirus pandemic. Since its emergence in China and its gradual spread to Asia, America and Europe before reaching Africa, the pandemic we have already become accustomed to calling an invisible enemy, has been waging a total war on the human race, with health, economic, political, cultural and geostrategic issues at stake.

The challenges to health are the most visible. For all nations, life must be defended against death. Humanity must be defended against destruction. Funda-

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mental research is being carried out in this area with the aim of discovering cures and developing a vaccine. Doctors, nurses and all health care personnel are spreading and teaching the skills to allow people to protect themselves and others. The major medical organisations have rallied to receive the sick, to manage the daily human losses and to monitor the evolution of the pandemic and counter its ravages. What is at stake here is the capacity of all the medical and health forces to rise to the colossal challenge that Covid-19 represents and to defeat this pandemic: we must know this enemy, we must master its modes of operation, its propagation strategies; we must fight back, gradually reducing its destructive power; we must devise *an art of warfare that will lead to a definitive medical victory.*

The political issues at stake are also clear. We cannot defeat this pandemic unless the political authorities organise the fight at the level of each nation. Each country must be rallied at its own level and in its relations with other nations, to draw up a strategy for action, to organise resistance and to ensure that the common standards accepted by all are respected. All the States here are called upon to manifest their discretionary power.

They must activate their law enforcement agencies to keep the peace, raise funds for war chests and make them available to researchers. In this way, they can invigorate the national consciousness and keep it continuously alive. The State must thus keep the fire of hope burning within its frontiers and wherever its influence can be exercised in one way or another. It is the State, in fact, which is master of the *art of warfare* against the invisible enemy that is the coronavirus. In this war, there is a need for strong and organised nations, which maintain order and discipline as is required in wartime.

T*he economic stakes.* Countries are all aware of how the economic, financial and commercial fabrics are being torn, ripped apart and unravelled in these times of coronavirus. On a global scale as well as on the levels of individual nations, the rules that guaranteed economic stability are being undermined. Companies are either in the midst of bankruptcy or on the verge of collapse. The financial institutions are beginning to lose their way, literally and figuratively. Anxiety is taking a hold on the stock markets. The very wealthy doubt the solidity of the system that has enriched them and that is now being shaken in its foundations. We are becoming aware of the abject poverty on which the wealth of states and the financial power of individuals are based. We are also

becoming aware of the huge inequalities between countries and between citizens. We can see how unacceptable this is and how necessary changes in the world system are. The current economic system is fragile and indefensible in its very principles: unfair, inhumane, and in need of an ethics of equality and fairness to combat the pandemic that today makes no distinction between rich and poor.

This is where *the cultural stakes* show their importance. Culture is the foundation of values, and it stands proud thanks to these values, which enable people to live as people and to face death together. In these times of coronavirus, the question to be asked is what are the core values that we can summon together, humanity as a whole and the nations within their borders, to defeat the pandemic that is destroying societies today. Here we discover the meaning of solidarity, the meaning of conviviality, the meaning of sharing, the meaning of empathy, the meaning of humanity. Without the substance and tang of these words when they are experienced in their lived reality in times of misfortune and catastrophe such as the period we are now living through, we sense that our world culture is fragile in what it considers as essential: profit, accumulation of goods, greed, predation, power and domination. Many men and women today can clearly see that the war we are currently waging against Covid-19 commits us to rediscovering all these values. An ethical conscience is thus awakening which must be the substance of our humanity once we have overcome this pandemic. In the *art of warfare* against Covid-19, culture has a very important role to play.

Two words are also important now and they are gradually being resuscitated in their most positive sense. We are currently grasping the strategic meaning of the word "alter-globalisation" and the profound truth of the slogan "another world is possible". This is at the very heart of *the geostrategic challenges* of Covid-19. This virus today is not attacking one person, one community or a single nation. It is attacking the entire world. It is attacking the whole of humanity. The fight against it is being organised on a global scale and for all of humanity. It must be organised on this scale in order to create another possible world. Aiming for another possible world thus becomes the major strategic axis of *the art of warfare* against the coronavirus. It is to be hoped that today's humanity will have understood that this is what is at stake and will commit all its forces to overcoming this challenge.

Confronting our frailties and our pathologies

Faced with all these challenges, the reality that is most visible in our country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the immense scale and unfathomable depth of the lack of development that we haveto overcome. This lack of development, which is revealed in a particularly striking way by the coronavirus, concerns both the Congolese people and Congolese society as a whole. It reveals our deepest weaknesses and at the same time indicates what we have to do to release our most ardent energies in order to change our living conditions and the organisations that structure our social space.

What became clear in the coronavirus crisis was our country's *lack of scientific development*, particularly in the field of health research. We are becoming aware that in this matter, Covid-19 is revealing an unmistakable fact: we are a veritable desert in terms of scientific knowledge and basic research. Sixty years after our independence, we do not have the scientific weight that a nation like ours should have in the world. Our universities, research centres, our knowledge organisations and inventive capacities are not up to the standard that a nation like ours should represent in today's world order. We must now ask ourselves the following question: how long will we remain in this situation of a scientific desolation in the Democratic Republic of Congo? In the face of the coronavirus, we must put this issue at the heart of our concerns. This places us in a situation of urgency to consider the current pandemic not just as a one-off event to create an ad hoc response to the disease, but a challenge to the organisations that need to be put in place so that our society has the capacity to equip itself with the means to overcome all the future crises of the same type that it may be our fate to encounter. Among these organisations, the scientific foundations of the society are of primary importance. These are the ones that the Congo must firmly establish. I consider this task to be one of the most important. It is our major challenge in the face of Covid-19: to create a society where a spirit of creativity, scientific and cultural endeavour guide research into the major problems of society. In our country today, fetishist structures and charlatanistic religiosity have taken over from scientific analysis and the search for scientific solutions to the coronavirus among the general public. While the facts are clear on the transmission of Covid-19 and the systems to be put in place to defeat it, we hear voices among our people calling for recourse to mystical in-

cantations and spiritualist umbrellas against the divine vengeance that is now bearing down on the *hubris* of contemporary man. We hear people asking forgiveness from God for our sins against Him. It is even coming back into fashion to hail the ancestors for protection. The more this mindset grows and takes hold, the more we forget that we need an endogenous scientific system that is equal to the challenge of the coronavirus: high-level research, state-of-the-art equipment, efficient medical staff, appropriate health organisations and a population that is as widely informed as possible and educated in a scientific approach to realities, with a spirituality that enlightens reason and that is itself enlightened by reason.

In addition to lack of scientific development, Covid-19 shows us the l*ack of organisational development* of our country. While the pandemic required lockdown measures for the population and strict public hygiene measures announced by the public authorities, people were not able to organise themselves accordingly. They discovered that the stranglehold of poverty prevented them from organising themselves. They made it clear that they would rather die of the coronavirus than of hunger, as if hunger was inevitable and not something that could be overcome. Unable to respect the simple obligation of social distancing to combat the pandemic, they mostly carried on with their lives as if nothing had happened, claiming that the coronavirus could survive in the African heat and that it cannot conquer black resistance. In reality, what manifests itself in these attitudes is the social disorder to which the Congolese people have long been accustomed. Many researchers have already highlighted this characteristic of Congolese people. It should be added here that the organisational disorder in the Congo has disastrous consequences: it discourages collective creativity and prevents any possibility of individual initiative on a large scale. In the face of the coronavirus, we are obliged to question this Congolese attitude of disorder and to place ourselves in another orbit: the orbit of organisation, order and discipline at both individual and community level. If we do not take advantage of Covid-19 to set ourselves on this path, we are jeopardising our own future and heading straight for a fall.

The problem runs deeper. It concerns our *lack of ethical development*, essentially our relationship to truth and our faith in the meaning we can give to our lives. All you have to do is spend a little time on Congolese social media concerning the coronavirus to realise one fact: the Congolese people take huge lib-

erties with the truth, with the facts, with things as they are. This is undoubtedly a common sin of social media, but it takes on frightening proportions here. Take time to analyse the Congolese discourse on the coronavirus: you will find not only certainties that everyone knows and unoriginal truisms, but also blatant untruths, fabricated lies and grotesque mythologies that have sprung from the brains of people who are a little out of whack. The dividing lines between the true, the plausible and the false are difficult to establish. We can read practical recommendations to be remembered, welcome or unwelcome. But we also find propositions such as: Covid-19 is a fabrication of the Whites whose final objective is the extermination of the Blacks; the coronavirus is a biological weapon of the Chinese to weaken America; the coronavirus is not a virus, it is the product of Chinese 5G technology; the coronavirus is not dangerous for the Congo which is a country protected by God; the coronavirus is a punishment from God; the coronavirus is announced in the Bible; the coronavirus has hit Italy hard because Italy is the seat of the Catholic Church which is Babylon the Great Biblical Whore; with the coronavirus, the end of the world is nigh. More seriously, in the abundant Congolese production on the pandemic, there is no clear direction on the positive meaning we can give to the pandemic once the mashup of mystical-spiritualist incongruities are asserted in their patent absurdities. Today, the Congo must go beyond all this: seek the truth and make the truth the only thing to be grasped about the coronavirus; make sense of this virus by looking for what it is challenging us to change in our society. In fact, the concern is to make the pandemic a fruitful challenge for our overall ethical development in the Congo: encourage a nascent citizen who is sensitive to the truth, who is deeply, inherently reliable in being, speech, beliefs and action; to foster the emergence of a Congolese society capable of rational organisation and solidarity, capable of believing in itself and in its creative will.

There is another dimension of underdevelopment whose unpleasant presence in our society has been revealed by the coronavirus: *lack of political development*. In the management of the crisis caused by the fear provoked in us by Covid-19, *the art of warfare* in the political management of the situation is an art all in one block, an art made of unity of command, unity of action, unity of execution, with clear strategies, strong decisions, quick commitments and sharp attacks, irresistibly conducted, as in war. In our country there was some hesitation at the beginning of the war against the coronavirus, as if we didn't know

what to do. There was utter confusion in the decisions taken, particularly on lockdown. Before the Head of State decided to speak firmly, it seemed as if there were several decision-making centres, both at the top echelons and in the decision-making fabric of the institutions, where a certain dissonance could be detected.

People did not seem to understand what was expected of them. There were many different narratives circulating about the virus. We were faced with a weak political power leading a people without much intelligence. In addition, while the government was increasingly concerned about the virus and the war it was waging against our people, the political leadership was waging a war against corruption and embezzlement of public funds, thus diverting the attention of the people from the virus to the those stealing the country's money. This scandal was compounded by the escape of a warlord who was in the hands of police forces in Katanga and the problem of the fighting against negative forces in Ituri. All of this blurred the lines of the fight against the coronavirus in the popular imagination, as if there were more important priorities and more decisive emergencies than the war against Covid-19. Today, we need to rethink our entire policy base to meet the challenge of the new pandemic. We have to answer the question of what overall philosophy we should implement to ensure that our society is capable of dealing with unexpected dangers, whatever they may be. This philosophy is not to be invented, it is in the political norms and principles that have long been involved in the vision of political service in Congo: in the past, the government has been known for its *"right person in the right place", "to serve and not to help oneself", "people first", "acceptability before all else"* and all the maxims and slogans that our people recite all day long. But there is a guiding idea that is not often mentioned in popular ethics: it is that of politics as the art of being part of the history of one's people and the history of the world, the art of leaving visible positive traces in the historical trajectory of the nation. Every government has a duty to submit to this requirement and to measure itself against milestones that are the true measure of greatness. If political power in the Congo takes the coronavirus as an opportunity to think in terms of this vision of politics, it will be able to become more imaginative, more creative, more capable of finding creative solutions to the pandemic instead of just repeating what everyone else says about washing your hands and social distancing in everyday life. The real question for political power is: what

style of governance does Covid-19 allow us to establish for our people in today's world?

I now turn to *lack of economic development*. In the face of Covid-19, there is one measure that we would like the rich countries to take in relation to Africa: charitable debt forgiveness and increased international aid. This is significant. It highlights one of the pathologies of our country: the economy of indebtedness and its burden on the daily lives of our population, who are forced to rely on the hunt for donations and on the gathering of financial fruits that have fallen from the trees of international donors. We cannot make debt the economic lung and think that development is possible. We cannot depend on other people's money and imagine that we will manage pandemics like the coronavirus adequately. The debt economy is fundamentally an economy of dependence; and dependence is not a strength for a people. What is really at stake is the ability to break the cycle of debt and the bonds of dependency that are suffocating Africa and crushing our country. How can we break free of this prison? It is not the spiritual authorities and the presidents of overseas countries who should be begging for mercy and compassion from the rich countries to break us out of this prison and deliver us from the coronavirus. It is we ourselves, in the Congo and in Africa, who must understand that we cannot depend on the charity of others. Instead of the debt economy and international aid, we must imagine and implement an economy of empowerment and independence. Why? Because the economy of debt keeps us in bondage and the economy of international aid maintains us in contempt of the donors, in one way or another. We cannot believe that this situation could change in a day. But it is important to know that certain events reveal the responsibilities to be taken and the horizons to be opened up if we want to move in the right direction. The coronavirus is an indicator of our economic fragility and financial indigence. We need to think deeply about what we need to do from now on for an economy of dignity and self-care, the only economy that matters for asserting our humanity among other peoples and civilisations. The people of the Congo have not yet understood this. At all levels. They do not yet believe in these capacities for independence.

This is the moment to lead them to understand that the new virus that is spreading in the world raises the question of their capacity to face it as free and creative citizens who fight with their means and conceive of their own strategies

before counting on international cooperation and the resources of external partners. It is time to move in this direction.

If we understand this in this time of coronavirus, we will face our *lack of geo-strategic development* with confidence. On the map of the world, the Congo, like all of Africa, does not make its influence felt through its creativity and its capacity to give other corners of the planet something other than raw materials. The Congo is neither intelligent nor imaginative. Covid-19 makes this clear: at a time when Asia, Europe and America are burdened by the pandemic, Africa offers nothing, least of all the Congo. They do not have a global vision of the problem, with the will to provide their own solutions with global intensity. This has to change. The future must not be like the present. This is the question we should have in mind from now on. We must, in every area, explore all the possibilities to give something of Africa to the world. This requires much thought. This requires much imagination. This requires much action. This is Covid-19's challenge to the Congolese people and their society.

The Congolese art of warfare against the coronavirus

Faced with all the dimensions of our lack of development, what is our *art of warfare* today? What can we rely on? What can we believe in?

Today, the Congolese citizen can rely on the new awareness that has arisen in our land since the coronavirus reached us. Somewhere deep inside us, something is changing. We are gradually being changed by Covid-19.

How are we being changed? We are learning to doubt, on a large scale, the omnipotence of those who have kept us in all forms of underdevelopment until now. These masters of the world, we see them crushed under the "cursed thing", which the new virus is, in the words of New York's master, A. Cuomo. We see them hesitating, panicking, helpless in the face of the pandemic. We see them doubting their certainties about their economic system, about the rightness of their politics, about what to do about the present and about the future. Now we are beginning to doubt them. They are neither infallible nor all-powerful. When they propose vaccination campaigns, the majority of us refuse. We protest vigorously. It is not the vaccine itself that we reject. We refuse to be guinea pigs. It is a mere detail in appearance, but in depth it reveals that a new generation is

being born and is asserting its presence: the conscious generation, as Claudy Sia calls it on Radio France Internationale (RFI). This conscious Africa is the new opportunity for all African countries.

The doubt and rejection that emerge in conscious Africa is salutary in our country: it allows us to think for ourselves about what is good for us and what we should or should not accept, without any external pressure or guidance from donors. When a people begin to think for themselves and do not submit to someone else's ideas, even if they are wrong, they are on the right path: the path to liberation, the path to freedom. They become capable of establishing a true relationship of reciprocal enrichment with the words and actions of others.

At the same time as we doubt and reflect, we systematically criticise the proposals made to us. We have seen this in relation to lockdown. We quickly confronted this measure with the real situation of our people. Through popular criticism of the measure, we ended up with partial lockdown, pending measures more in line with the situation. Criticism allows a society of reason and intelligence to blossom. It opens up a horizon of faith in oneself and confidence in one's own abilities and possibilities as a human being. It is imperative that we broaden this horizon of capacities and possibilities for the Congolese people today.

To doubt, to reflect and to criticise constitute the path towards acting for change. We now know that we need to change, and change profoundly. Not with empty words and hollow slogans, but with visible actions. We will not emerge victorious from the coronavirus through fickle words, but through visible action in the organisation, anticipation, forecasting and concrete operationalisation of what we have imagined. The deliberate, desired change is not only in the field of health faced with the coronavirus, but in all the fields where we feel change is needed: politics, the economy, culture and geostrategy. It is now up to the Congolese people to resolutely embark on the path to this change. This is where we will assess our progress in the trial of Covid-19.

Conclusion

The strategy is clear now: *doubt, criticise, reflect and act accordingly*. This is not only our *art of warfare* against Covid-19, but our new cultural path, the culture

we need to change the Congo. It is to be hoped that the Congolese people will henceforth take this path. Our entire education system should be nourished by this hope and make it the leaven of what we must be from now on, of what we must think from now on, of what we must say from now on and of what we must do from now on.

Seen from this angle, the coronavirus will not have been only a disaster for our country. It will also act as a fertilizing force that we will remember in our national history, the fruitfulness of what philosophers call *creative destruction*.

Identical but different: a comparison between Ebola and COVID-19 after the Ebola outbreak in Eastern DRC (2018–2020)

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In February 2020, we were still monitoring the number of cases of the epidemic of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in North Kivu, eastern DRC, which was gradually decreasing. And at the same time, news of the new Covid-19 pandemic that was sweeping from China through Europe and into the United States was circulating everywhere. While in its early stages the virus was progressing at great speed, most African governments, like those in Europe and the United States, still regarded the pandemic as a distant problem and did not move quickly to take measures to deal with it.

While the last Ebola patient was discharged from hospital in North Kivu province on 3 March 2020, the epidemic having lasted more than two years, on 10 March the country recorded the first case of Covid-19 in Kinshasa. And it took two weeks for the authorities to take the decision to limit the damage by banning trade between the capital and the other provinces, but also prohibiting access to the country for all international flights. Panic thus set in among the Congolese.

From the way Ebola was handled and the arrival of Covid-19, one question seems interesting: what lessons had been learned from the Ebola epidemic for

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the Covid-19 pandemic? Was the population in the most affected regions better prepared for Covid-19? Will the lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak help citizens across the country to adapt to the new pandemic as well? What are the similarities and differences between these two pandemics?

Through this paper, we want to emphasise that these comparisons are crucial to anticipate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country and to know what measures can be taken to avoid it. However, one should not lose sight of the remarkable speed of circulation of the Covid-19 pandemic, which makes it impossible to anticipate with any certainty what might happen in the near future. Indeed, this moment of uncertainty reminds us of the many unexpected developments in Ebola epidemics – including the emergence of mistrust - for which the emergency response was not fully prepared. At the time of writing, a new death from EVD has been reported in North Kivu province.

The most important comparisons, as we argue in this paper, are those that citizens themselves make to assess the government's response, to understand the situation in order to act accordingly in the face of the new pandemic. One of the lessons learned from the research on "Humanising the design of the Ebola response in eastern DRC" (August 2019–January 2020) is the tendency not to take into account the needs and opinions of the citizens. The tendency is simply to adopt the perspectives and terminologies of public health interventions to assess citizens' behaviours and perceptions, and how they might be corrected. This trend clearly ignores the fact that the people targeted by emergency response also assess and evaluate the rationality of public health measures. Thus, distrust is not only rooted in traditional beliefs or conspiracy theories, but it also depends on the way citizens assess the rationality of the emergency response to the epidemic. In order to fully understand how a population will adapt to the new pandemic, it is important to take these comparisons and assessments into account.

Based on a series of interviews conducted by the "Pole FM" radio station with some people from Goma and Beni, we tried to find out how they are preparing to protect themselves against Covid-19. The responses show how the experience of living through the Ebola epidemic has shaped a new attitude towards Covid-19. For example, here is the response of a young woman who works as a receptionist in a local hotel:

"*With the coronavirus, we are much more vigilant than with Ebola. Since the*

coronavirus is more virulent than Ebola, we have increased the basic hygiene measures taken against Ebola fivefold. So the situation we experienced with Ebola has allowed us to be much more careful and conscientious about other epidemics."

This is also the position of a shopkeeper in Goma who confirmed to us that hand sanitiser gels have become scarce in the shops and pharmacies as everyone wants to buy them. His comments are as follows: *"When Ebola started, sales of hand sanitising products were low. But as the pandemic evolved, demand became high and unmanageable. We had never before achieved the level of sales that we have achieved since the first case in the country. Our stocks are empty and there is no hesitation about restocking them. It shows how Ebola has helped us a lot to become aware of the importance of self-protection."*

As these two testimonies show, Covid-19 represents a greater threat than the Ebola virus disease. In the case of Covid-19, citizens did not wait for the financial support and guidance of NGOs to take important preventive measures. This can be seen in certain decisions, such as the decision by school officials to stop classes even before the government chose this option. People's views converge on the fact that the transmission of Covid-19 is proving easier to control and contain than was the case with the Ebola epidemic. It was noted that when the first case of Covid-19 appeared in Kinshasa, it took only a few days for six more cases to be detected in Beni and Goma, raising awareness of the rapid spread of Covid-19 compared to the Ebola pandemic.

In the light of the above, another issue needs to be raised. It is as Paul Richards pointed out in the case of Sierra Leone: to what extent can the capacities for resilience and innovation that have emerged from creative adaptation to the Ebola epidemic inform the national response to the Covid-19 pandemic?

At institutional level, the national government quickly put in place systems to control travellers by installing hand washing points at borders and airports. In addition, the laboratories set up for the Ebola response have also been used for Covid-19. All these measures show how much citizens and the authorities have learned from the threat of the Ebola epidemic. One of the most important experiences the country has gained from the Ebola epidemic is the targeted quarantine of all categories of Covid-19 patients. In addition, there seems to be a strong social, administrative, health, political and epidemiological memory that can enable the country to fight Covid-19 effectively. In particular, the leadership and expertise of epidemiologist Jean-Jacques Muyembe, who was in

charge of the Ebola response and is now in charge of the Covid-19 response, is contributing significantly to reducing public panic.

However, and this is another central element of our research into the Ebola epidemic, it is also crucial to qualify the above comparisons between Ebola and Covid-19. As our interlocutors told us during the research: *"Each case, each village has its realities"*. Each case, each family, each village has its own realities. Epidemics depend on a multiplicity of factors, which sometimes present the emergency response with unexpected challenges. It is essential to note that the Ebola epidemic was concentrated in the part of the country called the "Grand Nord" in North Kivu province and in Ituri. However, the city of Goma was relatively stable compared to the epicentres of the Ebola outbreak, where an ongoing war palpably inhibited the emergency response. The national capital, Kinshasa, is 1,700 kilometres away and politically even further from the epicentres of the Ebola epidemic.

For example, when asked whether the people of Beni would take the measures for Covid-19 seriously after experiencing the Ebola outbreak, a doctor, with whom we worked during the Ebola outbreak, said that:

"Because the region has been affected by Ebola, it has certain advantages over other unaffected regions. The population is accustomed to the checkpoints and the majority of households have handwashing facilities. At the entrance to public places, there are hand-washing devices and thermo-flashes to take temperatures. This is an important achievement for the people of Beni. So the population is already prepared in terms of control measures."

Another informant from the local taxi drivers' association told us that they had already held meetings to draw up guidelines for all taxi drivers to implement the recommended protective measures. He said the following:

"Although it means a financial loss for us, we quickly realised the risk. We can affirm that the population of Beni will not resist the protection measures thanks to the awareness raising campaigns implemented for the Ebola epidemic. Discussions with the people of Beni provide insight into how the Ebola experience has contributed to a heightened level of vigilance in the face of serious diseases and how to go about protecting oneself effectively. The population is much more proactive, and more able and willing to collaborate with the authorised services in the response."

However, the comparison between Ebola and Covid-19 must take into ac-

count that the history of the Ebola epidemic in this region is a different story from that of the current Coronavirus pandemic. There are several reasons for this difference:

- Cancelled elections;
- Attacks by armed groups;
- The deterioration of relations between the state and society;
- Political marginalisation.

For these reasons, despite the availability of effective treatments and vaccines and the deployment of a large number of response workers, the Ebola epidemic lasted for over two years. Relations between response workers and communities steadily deteriorated, leading to mistrust and even some violent resistance. The messages were of the type: *"Ebola doesn't exist, it's just an invention to make money off Westerners",* messages heard from some local leaders. Still others said: *"Ebola is business"*, *"we won't wash our hands and we won't die"*, or *"you who believe in it, do it"*. These phrases had become slogans in the streets, public places and in some discussions. In the face of this, the response of decision-makers was to take seriously people's expectations in terms of fair and decent treatment. Thus, creative adaptations such as decentralisation of care and treatment were initiated to reduce mistrust (Shuchman 2019; Park et al. 2020). However, these adaptations came late and after resistance and mistrust had become widespread.

Today, the constant is also a certain discordance in the way information on the Coronavirus is conveyed by the country's political and health authorities, so that once again the population is beginning to doubt the information relating to Covid-19. Moreover, faced with inconsistencies in communication that bring the response process into disrepute, a large proportion of the population seek alternative sources of information, with the risk of high levels of misinformation that could in turn exacerbate panic among the people. To avoid this panic, trust must be placed in those who have the responsibility to inform the public and respond to the crisis.

With the experience of Ebola, international and Congolese experts belatedly realised that the dominant approach in biomedicine, the transfer of medical knowledge and instructions for action, was not enough to build trust. The three dynamics that made it difficult to control the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu are also crucial to Covid-19's response: the shortage of drugs for other diseases, the

quarantine-oriented practice of treatment centres that hinders social contact and thus the flow of communication, and the population's long objective experience of state neglect and violence. To solve these problems, a climate of trust must be created by taking seriously both people's views on emergency response and their multiple realities.

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Fighting COVID-19 in Freetown, Sierra Leone: the critical role of community organisations in a growing pandemic

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Abstract: As the Covid-19 pandemic spreads in Africa, attention is increasingly shifting to the potential and ongoing impact on informal settlements, which face con- siderable challenges around the implementation of con- ventional control measures of social distancing, hand washing and self-isolation. In Freetown, Sierra Leone, residents of informal settlements have relied on local community organisations and groups, and their resource-fulness to provide essential preparedness, response and on-going support to alleviate the public health and economic risks associated with the effects of the Covid-19 outbreak. This is also premised on lessons drawn from dealing with previous epidemics, notably the Ebola virus disease in 2014–2015.

This paper will explain the nature and form of community organisation that can be galvanised and leveraged for Covid-19 preparedness and responses that are suited for informal settlements. Secondly, it highlights the critical contribution of community organisations in social protection measures that tackle deeply entrenched inequalities in rapidly urbanising contexts. Finally, the cases examined seek to provide evidence of the value of processes of continuous learning within community organisation that are essential for both humanitarian assistance and emergency management. Although situated in Freetown,

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the broad lessons drawn are relevant for urban-poor communities and informal settlements in many urban African centres.

1 Introduction

The shift in attention to the rapid spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Africa is largely premised on the fact that health systems in many countries are already stretched thin and will be quickly overwhelmed. In Sierra Leone, the mention of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic is a sour reminder of its recent brutal battle with the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in 2014–2015. And similar to Liberia and Guinea that were the other epicentres of the epidemic in West Africa, years of underinvestment in the healthcare systems exposed both the limited capacity to respond to the emergency and the vulnerability of people living in informal human settlements. There were not enough surveillance systems, response capabilities, public health infrastructure, or diagnostic capacities in place. Other challenges were posed by limited resources, inadequate understanding of the health threats and an overstretched health workforce. In informal settlements, the burden was disproportionately borne by children and women (especially pregnant women) owing to their higher susceptibility to the disease, as well as their vulnerability to the harsh environmental conditions. Critical challenges ranged from the shortage of health workers, limited financing, lack of information and limited medical supplies to inadequate knowledge on how to deal with the disease. Again, women and children were disproportionately affected given the substantial reduction in health care utilization especially in the area of maternal health delivery, vaccination coverage and malaria prevention among children. Similarly, the epidemic adversely affected the treatment of chronic diseases, as limited state resources were diverted to fight the health emergency. Overall, the scale of the EVD outbreak severely compromised health systems in Sierra Leone.

Some improvements have since been made to surveillance systems and reporting mechanisms, and the National Disaster Management Department has been empowered to operationalise emergency response systems. The government of Sierra Leone, with support from the World Bank, launched a National Covid-19 Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan, which focused pri-

marily on strengthening surveillance at the three official points of entry even before the country recorded its first case on 31st March 2020. These helped delay the onset of the pandemic and bought vital time for other, centralised government responses.

However, the level of epidemiological vulnerability in the city and their drivers are still not well understood due to data paucity. There is also a limited knowledge on how households are affected by the "double burden" of disease especially in many cases where Covid-19 occurred alongside other protracted health conditions (such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer) which are of growing significance in urban areas because of age, poverty status, lifestyle, and living conditions. The detailed impacts of the interactions between chronic and infectious diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole are largely understudied, particularly in informal settlements where such protracted ailments tend to go unnoticed by healthcare systems.

Overall, the status of healthcare provision in Freetown remains weak due to the limited scale of infrastructural improvements since the EVD epidemic in Freetown, gaps in technical capacity, as well as ongoing challenges of affordability and accessibility, particularly for the urban poor. Based on this knowledge, this paper seeks to provide a deep dive into how informal settlements in Freetown have coped and to further demonstrate the utility and resourcefulness of community organisations in the Covid-19 fight. More broadly it contributes to the discourse on the repertoire of community-based practices, innovations and interventions as entry points into the understanding of disaster and health risk management in informal settlements in Africa. In the context of Covid-19 responses, it provides an empirical demonstration of how community-based organisations reduce vulnerability and increase capacities of residents, minimise suffering and contribute to recovery from its impacts.

2 Covid-19 in Sierra Leone: another burden for the urban poor

Sierra Leone has recorded relatively few Covid-19 cases – 2,406 cases recorded out of 68,530 tests conducted as of 24/11/2020 and was one of the last on the continent to confirm an index case. The low case numbers can be attributed to

Figure 1: Distribution of formal and informal housing types across Freetown. Source: World Bank, 2019.

limited national testing capacities (only three laboratories nationwide), low staffing levels and weak health referral systems.

As in many other countries, urban centres are already bearing the biggest burden and informal settlements residents living in precarious housing conditions on marginal lands, which often lack basic services are at even greater risk. They are trapped within different cycles of health, environmental and socio-economic hazards which severely impact the health outcomes of rapidly expanding cities that have fallen behind on adequate planning. These settlements also typically develop outside the legal systems intended to record land ownership and tenure and enforce compliance with regulations relating to planning and land use, built structures, and public health and safety. Residents of informal settlements in Freetown were hardest hit by Ebola and other seasonal, recurring health risks. In the face of Covid-19, vulnerabilities of informal settlements are even more apparent, because of the impracticality and unaffordability of conventional mitigation measures such as social distancing, self-isolation

and regular handwashing due to overcrowding and limited access to safe water and adequate sanitation facilities. The projected urban impact of Covid-19 is very dire, especially since over 35% of the city's population live in very dense clusters (Figure 1).

Despite the known vulnerabilities of informal settle- ments, the resourcefulness of residents has yet again been brought to the fore in dealing with the threat of Covid-19, particularly in mobilising initial collective responses and initiatives as the first line of defence in the fight against the virus. Initial reports from Kenya, Malawi, India and several other countries with existing local groups and networks such as those belonging to the Slum and Shack Dwellers International (SDI) network highlight the critical role community groups play in managing everyday disas- ter and health risks and protecting the most vulnerable in the wake of the growing pandemic.

3 Methodology: assessing community organisations in informal settlements

Informal settlement residents have considerable agency on the ground through elaborate and well-organised systems and structures, that have become the backbone of several interventions done locally which bridges development and disaster risk reduction gaps in urban areas. They have different levels of leadership and agency and able to collaborate and co-pro- duce responses to local needs, and this capacity could be harnessed to help with necessary Covid-19 interventions. Additionally, they maintain strong social networks within communities and with external service providers (e.g. NGOs and government) which they have used to their advantage to meet basic needs like water resources.

In Freetown, the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP) and the Centre of Dialogue on Human Set- tlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA) have been instrumental in providing and facilitating leadership of community groups, particularly in informal settlements in Freetown. The FEDURP is an urban grassroots organisation of more than 7,000 individuals from Freetown's informal settlements, which is supported by CODOHSAPA that provides technical assistance and bridges the gap between the government and the

communities. Together, the two organisations have a common mission to "empower urban poor communities to improve their social, economic and environmental conditions by creating spaces and opportunities through collaborative actions to champion their own transformative and development agenda". The Freetown Federation is a member of the global SDI network, which is committed to empowering poor residents in urban spaces. The SDI network has spearheaded several initiatives that provide promising practices that increase the resilience of the urban poor. SDI activities include forming savings groups, peer-to-peer exchanges, community profiling, enumeration, and mapping of informal settlements. They also implement disaster-risk reduction strategies to respond to local risks such as flooding and landslides, deliver training for community fire preparedness, and collaborate with local governments to advocate for other community-led processes. In Freetown, FEDURP and CODOHSAPA were critical in fighting the Ebola outbreak, and have since played a gradual but increasing role in the city's development vision, especially through engaging with the Freetown City Council (FCC) and the Office of the Mayor. FEDURP, with the support of CODOHSAPA, coordinates Community Development Committees (CDC) and Local Networks of Savings Groups and Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMC) in nearly all the informal settlements in the city, as well as working with the Community Health Workers (CHW) that are endorsed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) to strengthen the link between communities and the formal health system.

Both CODOHSAPA and FEDURP work closely with the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) which is a globally connected research centre that produces knowledge for policy, planning and advocacy on urban Sierra Leone. SLURC also builds the capacity of urban stakeholders and fosters knowledge management with the intent of improving the wellbeing and living conditions of marginalised populations in Sierra Leonean cities and towns. SLURC has also played an important role in curating spaces for continuous learning and relationship-building between FEDURP and community residents, including the formation of "Community Learning Platforms" (CLP) for mixed groups of community actors to collectively build their capacities to address urban risk. One of the main activities of the CLP is to support interventions by the local authority and other local-level actors working in informal settlements to im-

prove the wellbeing of residents. The different stakeholders that participate in the CLP work together towards common goals and take on responsibilities to respond collectively to diverse challenges faced by the rapidly urbanising Freetown.

We draw on the work of SLURC, conducted in partnership with the FEDURP and CODOHSAPA over the last 5 years in advancing pro-poor policies and practices for selected informal settlements in Freetown which provides a contextual knowledge of informal settlements. We also rely on a series of studies conducted by SLURC to assesses the major health determinants, patterns and effects that impact informal settlements in Freetown, as well as the existing practices and community mobilisation that have developed especially in the post-Ebola context of the city and expand on initial reflections captured as part of this study. We argue that it is imperative to further highlight and contribute to the discourse on the resourcefulness and agency within informal settlements since top-down strategies to address health and environmental risk are likely to ignore the often-robust social groups and knowledge that already exist.

The study leverages in particular on FEDURP and CODOHSAPA's trust they have built with residents over the years of working together in the selected communities and their leadership enjoys broad support and integration within the communities. They served as the entry points into the settlements through their activities, and collaborations with other community organisations such as that of the CLP, CDMC and CDCs. In the advent of Covid-19, the entry points include the established work of community organisations and their engagement of residents in sensitization campaigns on hygiene practices, mobilisation and distribution of relief items including food, the management of information and dissemination in the settlements, and they serving as liaisons between the local government authorities and residents.

In addition to providing contextual knowledge of informal settlements, we base our argument on qualitative research and interviews conducted between February and April 2020. Our research covered three distinct phases: the first, when the government declared an official state of emergency, the second, when an official lockdown was enforced, and the third, after the index cases of Covid-19 were recorded in urban Freetown. The research was conducted in 6 selected informal settlements: Portee Rokupa, Palmoronkoh, Cockle-Bay, Oloshoro, Thomson Bay and CKG (Crab Town, Kolleh Town and Grey Bush). The settle-

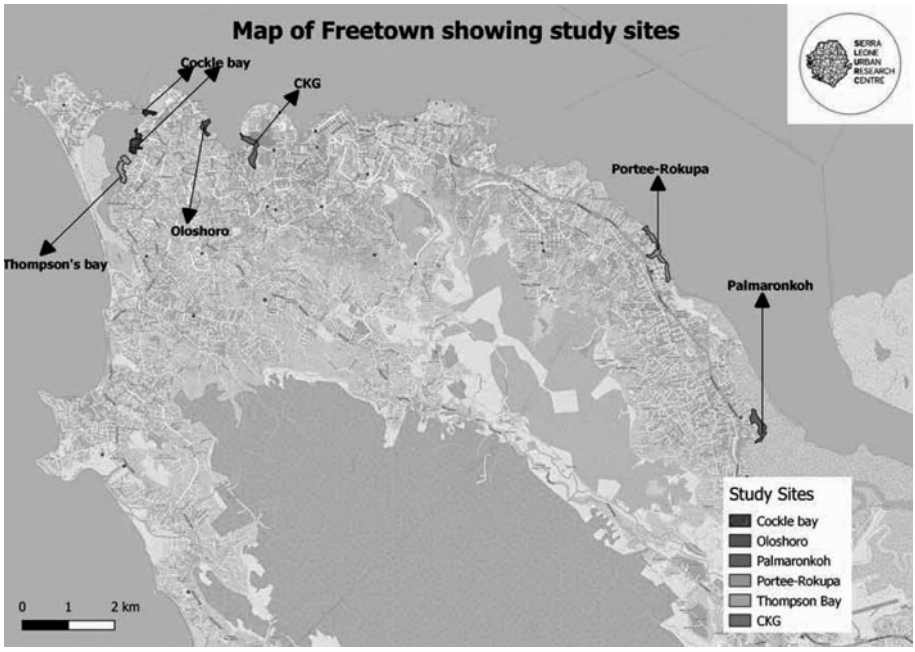

Figure 2: Map of Freetown showing the various study sites. Source: Authors, 2020.

ments were purposively selected based on our experience of working in informal settlements in Freetown, having worked in the six settlements for over four years and being already familiar with the health and wellbeing challenges faced and the kinds of community-level structures present. All six settlements have common features of informality – all are unplanned and densely settled with poor housing conditions, all lack basic services and laid-out streets, and all are disaster-prone, causing severe accessibility problems for any formal health systems' responses, and therefore all rely on the propagation of community-led strategies (Figure 2). These settlements were also selected because they have persistently suffered some of the worst forms of disaster events faced by the city. They were the hotspots for some of the notable health emergencies in Freetown, including the 2012 cholera epidemic and the 2014–2015 Ebola outbreak. At the time of writing, only four of the settlements had confirmed Covid-19 cases – Cockle Bay, Portee-Rokupa, Thompson Bay and CKG. Although the remaining two have no officially recorded cases, the overcrowding and unsanitary conditions puts them at high risk of the disease, with great prospects of serving as hubs for its transmission. Therefore, the study of these settlements not only

presented a picture of the Covid-19 situation in Freetown but allows for a detailed contextual understanding of community-level actions in response to the pandemic, especially during the critical official lockdown. The key informants in this study were the leadership of FEDURP, and the leaders of the various CDC in the selected settlements. Additionally, the leaders of various CBOs, namely the Foundation for the Future (FFF) in Cockle Bay, the Portee Environmental Youth Organisation, the Millennium Youth in Portee- Rokupa, and the Palmaronkoh Philanthropic Group, were also interviewed. Finally focus group discussions were organised with members of the various Community Development Management Committees, members of the CLP, Councillors and Ward Development Committee (WDC) Members. The selection of these key informants was based on their first-hand knowledge of the issues and involvement in health and disaster management activities and specific roles played in the advent of Covid-19.

4 Raising the first line of defence: community responses to COVID-19 in Freetown

Based on observations, interviews and qualitative research carried out in the six informal settlements, our findings confirm that community organisations in Freetown play a number of vital roles on the ground as the country adjusts to the reality of dealing with Covid-19. These findings feed into the annotated reflections below, by highlighting three critical contributions of community organisations aimed at minimising the spread and effects of the pandemic.

4.1 Managing information

Community groups perform the very useful job of sensitisation and awareness creation efforts and have been instrumental in designing, managing and disseminating information about Covid-19 and its appropriate mitigation. This was done at a very early stage in the pandemic to bridge information flows from official government channels and residents. In all six communities studied, information about Covid-19 was curated from diverse means, including official

health channels (World Health Organisation [WHO], MoHS, radio and TV channels). Some community groups like FFF in Cockle Bay, process and reproduce information from the MoHS and WHO websites, and disseminated print outs to community residents. In Portee-Rokupa, respected community traditional leaders and elected councillors have evolved as trustworthy sources of information and residents depend on them for regular updates from MoHS and other health professionals. Practical information about social distancing, the use of face masks, and the need to inform health workers when Covid-19 symptoms are noticed are further disseminated throughout the community by residents themselves through their local networks, and done predominantly by word of mouth, moving from house to house. As well as through mass dissemination via the social messaging tool "WhatsApp", which many people already have access to and are conversant with. This task of information dissemination is also championed by the FEDURP coordinated CDMCs and the MoHS supported CHWs, that are stationed within the communities. The CDMCs and CHWs disseminate information with limited support from outside, displaying flyers with Covid-19 prevention information, and using mobile public address systems to educate community residents.

The growing liaison between community groups, particularly FEDURP and the government (MoHS) has been particularly well received and is in itself seen by the community groups as a more effective means of utilising their potential and agency. FEDURP asserts its leadership role in this regard:

- We want to take charge of information dissemination about Covid-19 in the informal settlement in Freetown because we want to enhance clear messages as we are able to coordinate with other community structures like CDMC, CHW, WDC, CDC and CBOs to do this. (FEDURP Executive)

Furthermore, the growing liaison and engagement are regarded as a means of legitimising their presence and potential to manage grassroots information dissemination and other Covid-19 mitigation practices. As noted by one organisation's executive:

- We are now happy that most government officials have recognised that it's not only councillors in the community, we also have various other local structures in the community like traditional leaders, religious leaders, community development groups.

Whenever, they have a meeting about anything in the community they call all the groups in the meeting. (Executive, Palmaronkoh Philanthropic Group)

The proactive information dissemination on Covid-19 builds upon an important lesson learnt from the management of the Ebola outbreak, where unfortunately the void in information flows led to the spread of misinformation, distorted health messages and even created panic in communities. With this in mind, community groups have aimed to dispel rumours and misinformation and enhance coherent messaging about Covid-19. In Portee-Rokupa, a loose alliance of all CBOs formed during the Ebola response was reactivated and renamed Portee-Rokupa Corona Response Team, specifically tasked to address misinformation. It has become necessary for communities in Freetown to understand that Covid-19 is a deadly pandemic, but at the same time appreciate that it is not the same as Ebola. Negative messaging such as "Ebola kills" was found to be counterproductive and there was the need for more targeted engagement that was geared towards behavioural change. In Cockle Bay the need to address false information was identified as one of the foremost priorities to be championed by the local youth group, FFF which was proactive in designing programmes to respond specifically to that need.

- Well, for FFF, we have organised some awareness and sensitization campaigns about the pandemic in the community, and we are identifying and showing them facts to dispel fake information about corona. (Executive, FFF, Cockle Bay)

The critical role of youth groups in community-led Covid-19 responses has also been identified in recent reports from Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Mozambique and Kenya, taking on a variety of initiatives ranging from information management to crowdfunding sanitation projects.

In Palmaronkoh, a health expert was invited to provide training for all community stakeholders including representatives of "ataya" bases (communal spaces for socialisation and drinking of tea), social clubs, women's groups, etc., to dispel Covid-19 related myths. The critical focus in these endeavours has been the need to ensure that information is transmitted in a clear and accurate manner. The FEDURP has played a central role in sourcing and verifying information online from the two approved government channels and translating them into the local language for community dissemination, thereby bridging

the digital divide for many residents. Consequently, daily updates are shared by the WDC through designated WhatsApp groups for those with smartphones access, and verbally to other community residents who would ordinarily not be able to access information through social media.

4.2 Dealing with ground-level politics and power relations

It has become apparent in disaster management efforts, especially in urban informal areas, the need to recognise and address local-level politics and dynamics that would be affected by any intervention. In Freetown, community leadership is a multi-layered construct ranging from traditional, religious leaders to elected representation, and reflecting the authority to which different constituentssubscribe. Because of the multi-layered leadership, trust often depends on positionality or specific circumstances. For example, because chiefs are often regarded as old, uneducated, with limited networks with the National Emergency Response Centre (NERC), residents in Cockle Bay and Oloshoro do not trust their knowledge of Covid-19 related information. They rely mainly on the CDC and the WDC leaderships for information. The WDC in Cockle Bay, headed by the councillor, is more trusted because he is privy to first-hand information from FCC and official government channels. The CDC chairman in Oloshoro is believed to be well connected within the FEDURP structure itself as a national executive, and has regular external relations with the Office of National Security (ONS) and FCC. A recognition of the diversity and power dynamics of the different types of local leadership is essential for effective crisis management, as their authority can be leveraged upon for compliance and enforcement functions. This has been useful in Freetown as religious leaders have been instrumental in enforcing the closure of public worship sites as part of crowd control and social distancing measures.

Community organisations have also effectively mediated the activities of security agents and frontline health workers performing contact-tracing and reporting functions in informal settlements. The partnership has raised the confidence and trust of residents in these external surveillance activities and allowed for their smooth functioning. This is seen in the police recently engaging the CDC and the Philanthropic Group in Palmoronko to help enforce social

distancing at public spaces like water access points and "ataya" bases, and restrict movement during the official lockdowns. This is a very important observation as in Freetown, the NERC primarily partnered with the police service to conduct contact tracing and also to enforce the lockdown mobility restrictions. The presence of the police in an informal settlement can be unsettling and a tense encounter for most residents, but the partnership with community organisations whom they can identify and trust, made it feasible. Also, the groups eventually took over some of the enforcement functions mandated to the police.

- **The police cannot ensure proper lockdown measures without our help. It is us who also ensure social distancing measures are followed at water points during lockdown. (Executive, Palmaronkoh Philanthropic Group)**

The reception and effectiveness of the contact tracing efforts within the settlements are also attributable to representatives of the community organisations speaking up against negative comments and dealing with situations of blame and stigma when particular people or households were identified in the process. This intervention was particularly important as the dense housing conditions and communal ways of living meant that contact tracing was quite an open door-to-door activity and devoid of strict anonymity. The importance of dealing with stigma within communities targeted at active and recovered patients and their families, and even for those with unconfirmed cases but in quarantine, has been highlighted as a critical spoke in the management of Covid-19 in other African countries. Stigma has severe consequences on people's mental health, wellbeing and even on future employment and livelihood opportunities, and remains a barrier to prompt testing and treatment. The enormity of this challenge will only grow as the pandemic lingers, and community organisations role in that regard remains crucial across the continent.

In Portee Rokupa, the NERC partnered directly with the traditional authorities to help with contact tracing within their community. This marks a departure from the other settlements where community organisations played this role and is a recognition of the strong sense of universal support that the traditional leaders command there, as well as their ability to diffuse tensions and misconceptions arising from the activities of external agents on the ground. This change in tactic highlights the diversity of power dynamics, especially be-

tween known community organisations leaders, and traditional authorities when it comes to mobilising support for interventions. This needs to be duly taken on board in planning sustained actions and any other planned interventions in other informal settlements.

4.3 Initiating and sustaining humanitarian efforts

Community organisations have played a critical role in providing assistance to the most vulnerable in the settle- ments. They have been able to internally mobilise funds to provide potable water for drinking and other domestic uses, particularly during the periods of official lockdown and restricted movement. For instance, in Palmoronkoh and Portee-Rokupa, the pooled financial resources were used to purchase and fill water tanks (two 2,000 litre and one 10,000 litre, respectively) placed in accessible areas of the communities. Similar efforts in Thomson Bay and Oloshoro meant that public water points were now more accessible and residents did not have to leave their settlements or travel long distances for water.

Additionally, the local organisations planned and implemented a household quota system for water distribution, with due regard for the elderly and people with disabilities. As well as enforcing strict crowd controls at the water points to conform with social distancing protocols.

The local collective "Portee Ebola Response Alliance Volunteer" (PERAV), established during the EVD outbreak in Portee Rokupa, was revived and they mobilised themselves to provide support to INGOs and MDAs, such as the MoHS, Police and the local WHO office, with contact tracing, and quarantine processes.

The FEDURP and CODOHSAPA have played a critical role in liaising with external support agencies and coordinating relief and support. As part of the Freetown Mayor's Covid-19 response framework, the FEDURP was identi- fied to support the distribution of relief items meant for selected informal settlements. The FEDURP, through the activity of community learning platforms, coordinated responses such as hygiene awareness promotion campaigns among residents in the informal settlements. They also worked with the ward development committees/councillors to assess and identify vulnerable residents such

as the aged, female-headed households, people living with disabilities that may become beneficiaries of any extra or specialised support.

Through the support of the FCC and the NGO GOAL Sierra Leone, the FEDURP managed to establish community kitchens in Portee-Rokupa, Crab Town, Kolleh Town and Grey Bush (CKG) and Cockle Bay. These kitchens were fully operated by women and drew on their culinary skills and abilities to internally mobilise their collective labour. And they provided food parcels to residents during the period of official total lockdown. Community kitchens have been used as critical social initiatives to meet food security particularly in the events of emergencies and in the wake of Covid-19 have become increasingly popular in urban poor communities in many African and Latin American countries. The establishment and use of the community kitchens do, however, go further than the distribution of relief, and are seen as "sites of solidarity" and community mobilisation in times of crisis. This is particularly important as the pandemic lingers, as there will be a need for community organisation to become more creative, navigate the complex spaces of mobilising resources and identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. The partnership with the Mayor's Office in the community food kitchen initiative has demonstrated one way in which local knowledge is being recognised and valued by city authorities, and how that is useful in addressing the impacts of Covid-19.

Furthermore, community organisations through their partnerships with other external agencies have progressively assumed an active and dynamic role in humanitarian relief efforts, bringing about a shift in the notion of poor communities being merely helpless recipients of aid. For instance, CODOHSAPA has become the main implementation partner of the INGO "Y Care International" in identifying and delivering support and financial buffers to informal settlement residents whose livelihoods have been adversely impacted by the crisis.

What is noteworthy, in the above examples is the adaptability, flexibility and ingenuity demonstrated by community organisations in providing critical services that were non-existent or inadequate in the face of Covid-19. Despite the successes at scale, there remains, however, significant room to enhance the capacity of community organizations to scale up their actions. Beyond the collaborative potential demonstrated through work with the FCC, there is a need for the express recognition of their roles by the central government agencies

and authorities, and galvanising that recognition to channel resources to informal settlements across the city. For instance, as the pandemic persists, the FEDURP still reports of a gap in capacity within their ranks for the ongoing need to interpret, update and share health information across the tens of informal settlements, as well as a need for tools that could enhance and expand their roles as community gatekeepers and to perform health screening and surveillance checks, such as temperature checks. These are specific resources that the central government could readily deploy for the immediate benefit of community residents. There is equally a need for increased recognition of the agency of community organisations through the partnership and work of NGOs and other external support agencies. This is required to sustain the efforts of the community organisations, build further capacities, and disrupt the fragilities of NGOs working in silos. NGO's and external support agencies are critical partners in promoting and enhancing further the visibility of the work and agency of community organisations. The situated work of NGO's and external agencies within informal settlements albeit commendable needs to be meaningfully designed and delivered with community actors to create the shift for people-centred solutions that challenges like Covid-19 need, starting with the sustainable provision of water and sanitation services in informal settlements in Freetown. Furthermore, there also remains the on-going challenge of including community ideas, inputs or tried solutions in the government's broader development planning and disaster response.

This calls for progressive negotiations with the government that builds on the need for recognition of the resourcefulness of communities, and the opportunity to co-produce both knowledge and relevant services with them. The FEDURP has taken the lead particularly through its work with the FCC and its implicit image of credibility and track record of community representation. The responsibility also now rests on FEDURP to work to maintain representation, inclusion and coverage of its activities in the other informal settlements across the city, building on the diversity of other grassroots actors, networks and non-federated groups in the fight against Covid-19. Overall, Covid-19 has opened up a new opportunity for community organisations to step up and become more visible.

5 Conclusions

From this brief study, the resourcefulness, strength and value of community organisations in Freetown cannot be overlooked in the fight against Covid-19. Community-based initiatives are empowering to members of the various organisations, as well as to residents and provide an avenue of collective learning, both as an objective exercise (through training and capacity building activities), and from the lived experience of working together in the settlements to fight Covid-19. The elaborate net- works and structures of community organisations have become invaluable in helping communities in disaster risk preparedness, reduction and related needs as well as in bridging development deficits in the access to essen- tial services such as water and sanitation. Their skills and ability to organise themselves rapidly and tap into the long-term trusted relationships that they have built with the wider community are particularly relevant in dealing with health challenges such as Covid-19. And the utility and versatility of community organisations has become even more apparent and accentuated during periods of lockdown and restricted movement in the city, and the protracted socio-economic burdens that have arisen as a result.

The paper has also highlighted the critical value of understanding and appreciating the sheer diversity within and between informal settlements in urban spaces. The scope and varied focus of existing organisations such as those encountered in this study, in themselves reflect this diversity, as well as their awareness of and involvement of different social identities such as women and youth in targeted interventions. And although there are similar developmental challenges across informal settlements, the tangible mechanisms for addressing them, both in emergency and everyday situations would require a tacit acknowledgement and engagement of community organisations. In Freetown, this lesson seems to have been learnt through the Ebola outbreak in particular and the study further illustrates profound ways in which community initiatives can generate collective actions to manage health crisis with limited external support. And this is noteworthy, considering the high levels of deprivation in informal spaces in Freetown and the clear risks it presents for Covid-19 transmission (they are often described as incubators of communicable diseases owing to the unsanitary conditions). The concerted and well-coordinated ac-

tions of community groups have shown them to be the first responders during health emergencies, and their critical value should be harnessed to address the need for scaled-up rapid grassroots responses to wider disaster risk management in informal settlements. Furthermore, the increased ability of the community groups to work with external agencies, especially the City Council, is proving invaluable in the Covid-19 fight.

More broadly, it demonstrates how community organisations can broker and manage relationships and constructively engage with city authorities to communicate their needs and concerns. Through this, community organisations are cementing their role as vital intermediaries between the state and the people, on matters of humanitarian relief and bridging development deficits. And in that process, the complementary roles in this relationship between officials and community organisations has become particularly useful in bridging the apparent digital divides that stifled proper information management. Furthermore, this value of community groups goes beyond the mere creation of partnerships and reveals a deeper value of knowledge that can be co-produced and leveraged upon, and which is suited for the peculiar configurations of informal settlements. In most of the Freetown settlements, the usefulness of community knowledge in fighting Covid-19 ranges from the navigation of the actual physical space (in highly dense, unplanned and rapidly changing settlements), to the complex job of identifying vulnerable residents that need extra support in the face of a growing pandemic. More broadly, the initial responses to Covid-19 in informal settlements and communities of the urban poor have clearly shown the power of collective action, and the "repertoires" of interventions as seen in many Latin American, Asian, and other African countries. Despite the vast differences and peculiarities across these geographies, some commonalities remain in the range of interventions by community organisations in informal settlements which cover food security, filling information gaps on disease prevention, improved sanitation and income relief. Just like Freetown, community organisations in India, Philippines, Uganda and Kenya have played a vital role in relief distribution efforts and the complex task of identifying and targeting the most vulnerable. The Kenyan slum-dweller federation, a counterpart of FEDURP, has gone a step further to curate its own database on Covid-19 cases, advocated for the establishment of community isolation centres, and contributed to government guidelines on home-based care. As the coronavirus

pandemic lingers, the overwhelming lesson drawn from these community responses across various countries is the need to explore spaces and resources to scale-up initiatives and deepen their participation in any long-term recovery planning.

Overall, the study has also reflected the important contribution of community organisations in providing social protection measures that tackle entrenched inequalities in rapidly urbanising contexts. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the disproportional burdens borne by informal settlement residents in urban settings, but the responses of communities as seen through this enquiry, balances the narrative of how their needs do not equate to helplessness. Instead it demonstrates a range of ground-level capacities that deserve to be highlighted and harnessed for continuous development planning and implementation. The fight against Covid-19 in Freetown remains very active at the community scale.

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COVID-19: "Nothing will ever be the same again"!

Jean-Pierre Lindiro Kabirigi*

This article is dedicated to my colleague Godefroid Kangudie Kä Mana who passed away from Covid-19 on 15 July 2021.

In 2019, we received terrifying news from Goma, the capital of North Kivu (in DR Congo), that part of the province was overrun by the Ebola pandemic. It was difficult to understand how this virus had travelled from the north-west of the country (in the province of Equateur, where it had been reported) to take up residence here. At first, people could not believe it. We were used to fighting the daily ravages of malaria and typhoid fever, and the occasional outbreak of cholera. Ebola was a problem in the western part of the country but also in some West African countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Conakry). But the Ebola virus was in fact there and unfortunately it killed people in our province. The transmission route of the virus made everyone panic. It was strictly forbidden to approach, and especially to touch, the body of a deceased person. For an African steeped in traditions that include a legendary respect for the dead, this is tantamount to sacrilege.

Our salvation came from the experience of having already fought this virus, which had emerged in the Congo more than once, and from the international institutions that organised a rapid response, both at home and in other countries.

While everyone was busy trying to figure out how to protect themselves from this faceless enemy, we had no idea that something worse was about to arrive!

In March 2020, word spread like wildfire about a new virus, this time from the most populous country in the world: China. Wuhan, a Chinese city I had never heard of before, was suddenly splashed all over the media.

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Speculation was rife that the virus had been transmitted to humans through the consumption of bat or pangolin meat, which is highly prized in a country with a larger population than the whole of Africa. Just as we had learned about the Ebola virus, again we had to change our way of life. Some unusual rules were announced:

- You will not greet a friend, relative, or any other person by shaking hands or kissing!
- You will not go out without wearing a mask on your face!
- You must keep your distance from other human beings while travelling, in public and private places!
- You must wash your hands before entering these places!
- As with Ebola, no more funeral ceremonies, or any other form of events such as: weddings, religious worship, etc.

In Africa, a continent that loves large gatherings of guests for festivities that last for hours, many people thought it was a bad joke.

It doesn't just happen to other people!

Because it was announced in China, many people in Africa (and indeed in some other places in the world) believed that the virus could be contained there. In a country where people eat small animals and the markets are mostly filthy, muttered the gossips. At first, I noticed a guilty negligence on the part of African leaders who visibly minimised the risk of the imminent arrival of this virus and its harmful effects on them. What a short memory!

We seemed to forget all about the wonders of the "new global village" that our planet had become. Yet even small traders from remote villages on the African continent had discovered the routes that lead to Guangzhou, the Chinese "supermarket" city that quickly supplanted Dubai (in the Arab Emirates) as the dominant city in this area.

It must be admitted that the prevailing discourse in the environs at the time was liable to reinforce the naivety of Africans on this subject. Some said that the continent of continuous, strong sunshine was not so exposed to the Coronavirus. Others went further, citing the genetic make-up of blacks, who are nat-

urally more resistant, as different from white and yellow skinned humans, who are less resistant.

Total illusion! Very quickly, and in an explosive manner, the virus crossed sea and ocean to reach other parts of the world. Incidentally, it was also temporarily forgotten about in China.

Gradually, the scientific data and the sad realities in several countries have proven that we are all in the same boat. Young and old, white and black, women and men.

The poor governance of the health crisis

The gold medal goes to the African continent, where many leaders, but also the population, have outdone themselves with highly reprehensible behaviour.

The most flagrant case in this area in my opinion is my own country, the Democratic Republic of Congo (a huge country with a population of almost 100 million).

Until recently, a number of people have referred to Covid-19 as: "white man's imagination or disease", "an epidemic reserved for rich people who are used to travelling to Europe or North America on planes", "a flu like any other", etc. I have discussed this many times with friends, family members and colleagues who looked at me like a Martian because I was wearing a mask or distancing myself from them.

Such an attitude reached all the way to the top of the state, so that ordering any kind of vaccine was not a priority for the government. And when the vaccine arrived anyway, through the World Health Organization (WHO) Covax programme, it was left in a corner until it expired. There was clearly a popular distrust of the vaccine, reinforced by sabotage by the authorities, several media outlets reported. The campaign to launch this vaccine, which was received free of charge, was nothing more than a minor news item. The President of the Republic, and several ministers, whose participation had been announced, did not appear in the end.

This is astonishing given that the Congolese Head of State has lost several collaborators (including his own uncle) to Covid-19 and that parliamentarians and other authorities have lost their lives to the same phenomenon.

In spite of all this, in July 2021 during a trip to the city of Goma, the President (currently also President of African Unity) was heard to announce: "I was right not to get vaccinated". In front of journalists, visibly stunned by this unexpected statement, the people around him (no doubt trying to save face) responded: "We are in a democratic country where everyone decides whether to be vaccinated or not"!

The heavy price to be paid for this carelessness is currently being seen across the country. Last month, the third wave of the pandemic caused enormous loss of life and many new cases, and this is still ongoing. According to the statistics, 84% of these cases are the result of the terrifying Delta variant. So how long will the blinkers stay on?

Other African countries, particularly the neighbours of the DR Congo, have not changed their behaviour. In Burundi and Tanzania, the governments have only just begun to talk (often paying lip service) about the pernicious effects of the virus. It was only when the virus carried off their heads of state (even if some political speeches still deny this) that people began to believe in its existence. Of course, some people still insist that these leaders were murdered because of their struggle against the West's insistence on persuading them of the existence of the virus.

That said, it is fair to acknowledge that health crises are not new, and that the rapid and radical intervention of the state does not seem to be very innovative so far. One only has to look at how the Ebola epidemic wreaked havoc in Africa to see the timid involvement of state officials, who are often called out by external powers. There are few states capable of saying to their citizens "I am protecting you from certain death", i.e. from infection by a virus whose appearance is known only to scientists and whose effects become understandable only through the publication of statistics by serious and committed media. Fortunately, the world is increasingly discovering courageous whistleblowers who risk their lives to save thousands of others.

In a health crisis such as the one we are currently experiencing, the public administration should assume an educational role to rally the people to become aware of the real danger they are facing, instead of subjecting them to unreasonable manipulations, as in several cases we can observe in Africa.

Conspiracy theories galore!

All over the world, we have witnessed scenes of collective hysteria denouncing the conspiracy hatched by evil forces to spread Covid-19.

In Africa, this has assumed disturbing and disconcerting proportions. This phenomenon reached its peak when the vaccines were introduced. Incredibly, we heard utterances such as:

"Beware the Antichrist is here"! "Satan has descended to earth"! "The Illuminati are taking action"!

A significant number of Africans still believe that there are two kinds of vaccines: those for the rich in the North and those made specifically for us poor Africans. The African version is allegedly intended to exterminate the black race by sudden death or sterilisation with the purpose of monopolising our immense wealth (soil and subsoil). As if we ourselves were not doing enough to abandon our natural resources to others. Many people even talk about the famous chip that could be inserted into our bodies to reduce us to a state of dehumanised beings. In long discussions with people who seemed informed and reasonable, I often failed to convince them that the virus had already killed more Americans, Brazilians, Iranians, Italians, etc., than African victims. Nothing has any effect!

More than once, I was told about a plan to exterminate the black race. This would be the reason why the decision-makers of this plan systematically eliminate any political leader who opposes their satanic project. The most recent would be Haitian President Moïse Jouvenel who was assassinated not so long ago. Before him, there were the deaths of Presidents Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi and Magufuli Pombe of Tanzania. They will shortly be followed by: Isaias Aferwerki from Eritrea and Kim Jong Un from North Korea (although unusually the latter is not black!).

Such attitudes had already emerged when the HIV virus arrived in Africa. In the early 1980s, the first cases were reported in Kinshasa, the country's capital, while my family and I were living there. In the face of this mysterious disease, which in the beginning killed many more Congolese who had sojourned in the United States, cries of alarm went out that there was a plan to exterminate us, starting with our elites.

It was only when people from poor neighbourhoods started to suffer this

fate, in addition to the scientific information that started to circulate, that opinion very gradually changed.

Today, the space for rational thinking is shrinking terribly. Few people check or cross-check any information they receive from friends, relatives or through other channels, including the media. Social media bombard people with information that whips up emotion and millions of human beings take on the task of spreading lies. Sometimes these news items turn out to be instruments that ignite a neighbourhood, a city or even an entire country. Have we not been witness to inter-ethnic massacres and savage looting based on rumours started by informants with malicious intent or hidden agendas?

In addition, the rise of so-called revivalist churches and Muslim fundamentalists is causing havoc everywhere. Both have often been the basis for the great conspiracy theories described above. In a society living under the burden of impoverishment and misery, these churches reap great success because they give poor people hope for perfect happiness in heaven.

Covid-19-business

More broadly, it is the whole model of liberal industrial and commercial development that deserves reflection, from consumption and production methods to climate change and animal health. It is nonetheless difficult to believe in the possibility of a revolution in this area. A violent and massive retreat from globalisation is unlikely, let's face it, unless there is strong pressure from governments, because companies, pharmaceutical companies in particular, have no reason to give up the advantages of international production chains, in terms of costs, competitiveness and profitability. On the other hand, it could be possible to move towards a diversification of production chains.

"Fragmentation dynamics", "the rise of national egoism", "every man for himself", "the rationale of powers": multilateralism is in distress, in a world made anxious by the pandemic, where states are retreating into themselves.

The United Nations organisations often look on helplessly at the occasionally unacceptable behaviour of powers that hide behind the fine terminology of "Security Council countries", each with a veto power to block any decision that goes against their interests. It is well known that the financial sector always fares

well in wars and crises ... because it always invests on both sides and even on all sides. But this crisis may also be an opportunity, it might be an opening to restructure the global financial sector and no longer making it dependent on a single currency (the US dollar) that has been imposed for so long.

Urgent need for an Africa of solidarity

The epidemic should encourage us to see ourselves as members of the same community. It should force us to make an effort of imagination that we are not used to: realise that we are inextricably linked to each other and take account of the presence of others in our individual choices. In the face of contagion, we are a single organism. In the face of contagion, we become a community again. In the face of contagion, the lack of solidarity is above all a lack of imagination.

We should remember that thinking about humanity does not mean thinking only about ourselves. It is by moving away from individualism that the notions of sharing, of taking risks together, of refusing fatalism, become realities again. Solidarity should enable us to give us a chance of pulling through.

The time for procrastination in Africa should be behind us. The future does not look very bright. Just when we thought that Covid-19 was someone else's business, here we are, it is our turn to suffer from this pandemic. No one can predict today to what extent we will be affected, but it would be better to sound the alarm! After all, we are dependent on the outstretched hands of those who have the key to getting out of this situation, so that we can cope. The statistics are frightening: we are only involved in 1% of vaccine production and so far only 2% of Africans have been vaccinated.

We should speed up the implementation of the "Continental Free Trade Area" (CFTA) that has been created within the African Union, instead of continuing to wait for answers to our problems from others. The salvation of our continent should now require us to do so quickly.

Governance lessons from the COVID-19 crisis for West Africa

WATHI No. 9

About WATHI

WATHI is a participative, multidisciplinary and innovative think tank focusing on West Africa. WATHI offers an interactive platform to all interested and capable individuals concerned about West Africa's future.

WATHI adopts a flexible definition of West Africa which includes the 15 member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as well as countries linking ECOWAS to bordering African regions, namely Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania.

Freely inspired by "waati" which means "time" in the Bamanakan language of Mali, WATHI expresses both the urgency of a collective mobilisation and the need for a long-term commitment.

WATHI is a not-profit association which is supported in its activities by its members and by partner foundations, notably in 2019–2020: the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Open Society for West Africa Foundation (OSIWA).

Mataki and WATH15 publications

WATHI5 is the short version of the Mataki that presents the proposed courses of action. Mataki (in French) and WATHI5 (in French and English) are available on wathi. org. Mataki means "measures" in the sense of "taking action, taking steps" in the Hausa language, one of the most widely spoken local African

languages in West Africa. Mataki is an extension of the section "Le débat" of the WATHI website.

The Special Series of publications on Covid-19 Lessons for West Africa

This WATHI5 and the longer Mataki version are the first in a special series on the economic, political, educational and regional integration lessons to be drawn from the Covid-19 crisis, as part of a project funded by the OSIWA Foundation, a member of the global network of Open Society Foundations.

* * *

In December 2019, China announced its first coronavirus case, a disease which was later named Covid-19 by scientists. This infection spread quickly to the rest of the world, affecting more than 170 countries, causing an unexpected health crisis. In addition to the health crisis, countries had to fight on several fronts, including preventing economic, financial, social and security chaos. Measures taken by governments around the world to respond to stop the exponential spread of the virus have brought a sudden and unpredictable halt to most economic, social, cultural and sporting activities.

The human toll on the African continent is far less alarming than in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated the flaws that already existed in the current models of political governance in Africa. From the management of public resources to the relationship between the rulers and the citizens, as well as electoral and non-electoral aspects of democratic practices, West African countries should learn lessons from this pandemic in order to build more inclusive societies where basic needs are satisfied.

Reccommendations

The Covid-19 crisis highlighted the essential role of States in dealing with emergencies that are vital to the population and in limiting the direct and indirect consequences of a large-scale crisis. The various examples presented in this report show that such situations require committed political leadership at

the highest-level as well as institutions and public administrations which must be better prepared to respond to unexpected crises. Responding to such crises also requires states whose leaders and public servants inspire confidence in the populations, know how to listen to all the driving forces of their countries and understand the necessity to integrate them into the decision-making process.

The courses of action proposed below take these requirements into account in the particular context of West African countries. The lessons in terms of political governance are in line with, and build on the recommendations outlined in WATHI's "Mataki" on the political and institutional reforms that countries in the region need to build effective democracies capable of meeting the security, political, economic and social needs of the people.

In order to cope with future crises, West African countries should put in place institutions, rules and principles aimed at strengthening inclusivity in the adoption of the most important decisions for a country, at planning and organizing the participation of citizens in the elaboration of public policies; at mobilizing and managing public resources with transparency and integrity, and at continuously adjusting responses when they fail to deliver the expected results.

Travel ban measures which made the medical evacuations of governing elites and their families to the most reputable European hospitals almost impossible for several weeks, was a reminder to the most senior West African politicians that everyone can pay a high price for the chronic and unjustifiable under-investment in the provision of the most essential public services to populations.

1. Improve the selection process of decision-makers and depoliticize public administrations. In particular:

a) Establish the principle of public hearings and confirmation vote, by a dedicated committee of the National Assembly for all ministerial functions and for the highest positions of civil administration and military nominees proposed by the President of the Republic.

b) Create or strengthen, where it exists, a public service commission responsible for ensuring compliance with the fundamental principles of public service, proposing rules governing recruitment, remuneration, promotions and sanctions in public administration, and ensuring the political neutrality of public administrations. This commission should also report yearly on the performance

of the public service, the efforts made to improve it, the most significant weaknesses both in terms of overall performance and the contribution to the reduction of regional inequalities in access to public services.

2. Organize the participation of citizens in public debate and in framing the orientations of public policies, in normal times as in times of crisis. In particular:

a) Create a High Authority in charge of consolidating democracy, an independent and constitutional institution whose mandate would be to conduct civic education campaigns for the population, to organize annual citizens' debates on the main areas of public action (education, health, safety, economic policy, social policy, cultural policy, environment protection, foreign policy) and to produce an annual public report on the state of democratic governance with recommendations.

3. Strengthen the protection of fundamental rights by parliament and by the institution responsible for ensuring respect of the Constitution even in times of crisis. In particular:

a) Ensure Parliament continues to play its triple role of representation, legislation and oversight during emergency situations by establishing a legal framework adapted to a state of emergency in general, and to a state of health emergency in particular. Significantly strengthen the capacity of parliament by providing the institution with adequate human, financial and material resources, including information and communication systems, and by setting up a publicly-financed training program for young public servants assisting parliament.

b) Establish a clear guideline for the appointment of the members of the highest court in constitutional matters (Constitutional Court, Constitutional Council, Supreme Court, depending on the country). Their mandate should be non-renewable and long-term and explicit conditions of personal integrity and relevant professional experience should be emphasised. This will reinforce the effective independence of those judiciary institutions.

c) As is the case in a handful of countries in the region, citizens should be granted the right of referral to constitutional courts for violation of a fundamental right or for any violation of a constitutional provision.

4. Maintain, even in a crisis situation, the institutional arrangements that limit the risks of misuse of public resources, fraud, embezzlement and corruption, and use appropriate technological tools to enable citizens to exercise oversight in order to contribute to the effective management of exceptional resources allocated in times of crisis. In particular:

a) Strengthen all the oversight institutions dedicated to controlling the use of public resources, such as the Office of the Auditor General and similar organs (depending on the country), in order to guarantee their members autonomy of action, effective Governance lessons from the Covid-19 crisis for West Africa independence and citizens access to official reports on the management of all institutions and agencies that use public resources, including funds allocated to the presidential institution.

b) Invest in the training of investigative journalists and establish legal frameworks for their protection and that of whistleblowers who investigate the use of public resources including in times of crisis.

c) Generalize dedicated digital platforms allowing any citizen victim or witness of corruption to safely report and contribute directly to the work of national institutions in charge of fighting corruption, fraud and malpractice.

5. In formulating public policy and responding to all crises, consult, listen to and involve scientists, innovators, entrepreneurs in the technology sectors and invest massively in scientific research, technology watch, education and training. Specifically:

a) Invest in national statistical institutes to ensure they provide credible and up to date data on the population to identify the most vulnerable households and areas most in need of basic social and economic infrastructures and public services. This will facilitate the adoption and implementation of targeted measures in crisis situations.

b) Enhance scientific disciplines, research and innovation by increasing the budgetary allocations to national research centers and support researchers to identify external sources of funding.

c) Create national database of researchers and experts, resident or not, in different fields of research, ranging from health to security and all other relevant research areas which must be regularly updated.

d) Establish, in an informal but organized manner, physical and virtual meetings of researchers from all disciplines, entrepreneurs from technology-intensive sectors, important actors from the national private sector, senior and military administrations, political authorities, including non-residents, to exchange ideas on major national and regional issues. Establish a database of experts that can be mobilized and consulted in times of crisis by decision-makers.

e) Include in the mandate of the proposed High Authority for the Consolidation of Democracy, the possibility of the government seizing the institution and of the institution taking up on its own accord urgent issues. The High Authority should also be given the mandate to organize, in accordance with a special procedure, consultations by various means with personalities with specific expertise and/or relevant specific expertise and/ or relevant experience of crisis management to assist political authorities.

Conclusion

The findings selected in this report highlight the flaws in the governance systems of West African countries. They also show how the Covid-19 crisis amplified these flaws and served as a wakeup call for urgent correcting policy action in vital sectors. The proposed actions aim at reinforcing the resilience of West African countries to unavoidable crises in the future while taking into account the existing institutional and political challenges the region is facing.

Lessons from Covid for West African economies

WATHI No 8

In December 2019, China announced its first case of a person infected with a new coronavirus, which scientists later named Covid-19. Very quickly, this infection spread to the rest of the world, with more than 170 countries now affected. The world is facing a totally unexpected health crisis. In addition to this, countries are fighting on several other fronts including the economy, social stability and security. The African continent has also not been spared, even though the human toll remains much less alarming than in some other regions of the world. However, the economic and social impact of the pandemic on the continent is considerable.

The WATHI Debate is an initiative of the West African Citizens' Think Tank, and its second installment for the year 2020 focused on the implications of the Covid-19 crisis for the West African region. This document proposes five policy themes to guide the collective action of citizens and decision-makers in order to revive West African economies weakened by the crisis, with a deliberate choice to focus on medium and long-term objectives. It is the first in a series of publications on the lessons to be learned from the Covid-19 crisis in the economic, political and educational fields as well as for regional integration in West Africa.

Recommendations

The five key recommendations aim at stimulating in-depth debate on the economic policy responses that need to be made at the level of African countries –

particularly West African countries while taking into account the specificities of each economy. Some recommendations also relate to the lessons to be drawn from the health crisis in terms of education policies, political governance and regional integration. These will be the subject of forthcoming publications and confirm the need to further develop a multidisciplinary approach to responses to the challenges faced by the countries and peoples of the continent.

1. Strengthen agricultural development policies by combining modern technology adoption, training, digitalisation, environmental conservation and adaptation to climate change

a) Promote initiatives for local production of agricultural equipment at national and regional levels.

b) Fund agricultural scientific research for the improvement of seeds and agricultural techniques, taking into account the effects of climate change in the coming years and decades on natural conditions.

c) Develop training programmes in agricultural techniques and adapt them to local ecosystems.

d) Familiarise children at an early age with agriculture, animal husbandry and the natural environment, by revising curricula in the education system, from nursery to secondary education, and adapting educational content to the local context of each region.

e) Streamline existing financial support schemes for agricultural entrepreneurs and link financial support to training and individual monitoring of entrepreneurs.

f) Ensure that public institutions that support agricultural entrepreneurship recruit agricultural project monitoring advisors with proven skills in the field.

g) Develop a statistical database of actors (farmers and agricultural enterprises) and providers (agricultural workers, input suppliers, processors, transporters, exporters, etc.) in order to better target public policies aimed at improving the added value of agricultural products.

h) Develop digital technologies at the national level to increase agricultural productivity by providing farmers with permanent access to information on weather conditions, available technologies (improved seeds, fertilizers and tractors) and marketing channels, including export markets.

i) Introduce incentives for financial institutions, such as guarantee funds and credit lines, to finance SMEs involved in the processing of agricultural raw materials.

j) Facilitate the matching of supply and demand for agricultural labour through the establishment of an integrated information system that is accessible and affordable.

k) Stimulate intra-regional trade by facilitating the free movement of goods within trade corridors in border areas by removing informal security posts that fuel racketeering and other forms of corruption.

l) Reduce the lack of information on trade rules and procedures by establishing or strengthening trade barrier monitoring mechanisms involving government and the private sector, and extending them to include representatives of consumers and civil society in general.

m) Create spaces for citizen debate on agricultural policies, rural development policies and economic inequalities between territories. This will be in order to raise awareness among urban populations of the economic and social realities of rural populations, and the need to rebalance public investment in favour of the most disadvantaged regions.

2. Giving renewed priority to realistic industrialisation as an engine for job creation, economic diversification and reduction of external dependency

a) Equip ministries and public institutions in charge of economic development with human resources with proven expertise and experience in the design and implementation of industrial policies, and build bridges between national and regional research centres inWest Africa and public officials in charge of industrial policies.

b) Give priority to the coordination of agricultural policies, industrial policies and regional organisations, in particular ECOWAS.

c) Develop national industrial capacities through realistic planning by creating industrial parks and special economic zones by systematically integrating the "green" dimension in transport and logistics, energy supply, water management and sanitation choices.

d) Supporting local initiatives for the creation of industries by facilitating the formalisation of industrial enterprises and their access to credit.

e) Provide industrial projects with attractive tax regimes mainly for high value-added products identified on the basis of precise criteria and subject to regular re-evaluation.

f) Accelerate programmes for the development of technical and vocational training institutions in all regions and change the negative image of technical and vocational training in society and among young people through public communication activities.

g) Promote training and employment of young people in agriculture, livestock, agricultural and animal processing industries and logistics.

h) Develop a tax policy adapted to the size of companies that clearly favours companies that make verifiable efforts in creating salaried jobs, training young people and preserving the environment.

i) Develop incentives tailored to medium, small and very small enterprises to encourage them to create paid work placements and jobs, even of limited duration and on a part-time basis, for young people.

3. Enhance and transform the informal economy into a productive and solidarity-based popular economy through targeted support, training programmes and innovative financing mechanisms

a) Understand the reality of the informal economy, and in particular the distinction between large and small informal economies, so as to develop approaches adapted to each category of actors.

b) Use empirical research from field studies on the informal economy to inform the public policies to be implemented to transform, energise, support and eventually formalise informal enterprises.

c) Eliminate administrative barriers in the transition to formal economic activity by simplifying the procedures for registering the activity, accounting, tax and social security obligations, in particular through digital means.

d) Promote the creation of meso-finance institutions for the financing of small units of the popular economy.

e) Consider the creation of a specific status for employees in the largely informal personal services sector (domestic workers, childcare workers, caretakers, etc.), with simple contract models for employers to use, providing for a minimum wage and basic medical coverage.

f) Undertake communication campaigns to change the perception of the upper and middle classes in particular on the importance of these personal services and the need to ensure decent pay for these workers who have to cope with family burdens, including child rearing, which is crucial for social cohesion, security and collective progress over the long term

g) Strengthen the capacities of actors in the popular economy by giving them access to simple and inexpensive vocational training courses coordinated by a dedicated public agency.

h) Create the conditions for improving the productivity of individual entrepreneurs in the popular economy, particularly in crafts, furniture, mechanics, etc., by creating centres for access to and rental of machines and work tools according to the nature of their activities, in collaboration with the formal private sector and the State

i) Rationalise the often numerous funds dedicated to enterprise development and entrepreneurship promotion, drawing on the best examples of success stories of such schemes in Africa and elsewhere in the world, and ensure the training and mentoring of business development advisers responsible for providing assistance, coaching and training to innovative entrepreneurs and helping them to find financing for their projects

4. Improving the financing of the economy and public policies by mobilising domestic resources and fighting waste and corruption

a) Providing the tax administration with an optimal organisation for better tax revenue collection, by improving the organisational structure (e.g. creation of offices dedicated to large taxpayers), reviewing performance incentives, modernising procedures (digitalisation of filings, online declaration and registration).

b) Reduce corruption within tax administrations by strengthening internal and external audit services, protecting whistleblowers, simplifying procedures and providing taxpayers with clear and complete information.

c) Identifying potential sources of taxes that are underutilized, including property and environmental taxes.

d) Carry out campaigns to explain and raise awareness on the need to pay taxes, the logic guiding tax policy choices and the importance of greater mobilisation of domestic resources for the sovereign financing of priority public. investments as well as the reduction of external dependency.

e) Engage civil society organisations and the media at national and regional levels in the denunciation and identification of illicit financial flows.

f) Focusing attention on the sectors most exposed to illicit financial flows, including oil and mining resources in the region, such as gold mining, which is a major source of resource leakage in the region.

g) Inserting the debate on the scale of illicit financial flows, their cost to African populations as well as the responsibilities of external actors in blocking them on the international agenda while also organising African citizen pressure for responses at the international level.

h) Put an end to the uncertainty surrounding the effective implementation of the single currency project in the ECOWAS region by determining a new realistic timetable or by decisively choosing a new approach that preserves the overriding objective of strengthening political, economic and human integration in West Africa.

i) Undertake reviews of the vulnerability of public institutions to all forms of malfeasance and corruption, and on this basis strengthen the transparency of decision-making processes, internal and external financial control mechanisms and the effectiveness of administrative, financial and accounting procedures.

j) Create a culture of austerity, transparency and optimisation in the use of public resources, seeking margins for significant reductions in prestige spending and all unproductive public spending, including unnecessary missions abroad, in all public institutions.

5. Improve the quantity and quality of digital, energy and transport infrastructure and engage citizens in the debate on the choice of investment priorities and the monitoring of public action

a) Extend access to information technologies to the entire population by investing in the generalisation of high-speed internet connections and by providing a framework for the Internet services offered by telephone operators.

b) Supporting the survival and growth of digital technology start-ups through incentives for collaboration between small businesses and investment in infrastructure essential to their competitiveness.

c) Putting in place the legal framework necessary for the widespread use of digital payment systems.

d) Put in place a strategy for meeting the electricity needs of the population, in particular for the development of productive activities in rural areas, by encouraging the use of decentralised solutions using solar energy, geothermal energy and other forms of renewable energy.

e) Set up a permanent mechanism for citizen oversight on the use of funds allocated to road infrastructure maintenance, with a guarantee of access to information.

f) Set up a permanent system of citizen oversight on the management of public or private companies responsible for the distribution of electricity and water with a guarantee of access to information.

g) Relaunch national and regional railway projects and make them the preferred choice for major infrastructure development projects for the transport of people and goods to accelerate West African regional integration as well as connection with neighbouring regions in Central and North Africa. This will be following the recent example of Nigeria which has reinvested in new railway lines in recent years.

The selected findings presented in this document do not claim to be exhaustive. They present the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and governmental responses on West African economies. In addition to providing an opportunity to define a new paradigm, this crisis is also an opportunity for West African countries to accelerate efforts towards a structural transformation of their economies. The courses of action presented aim to respond to some of the most urgent and important challenges, realistically taking into account the limited financial capacities of the states and populations of the region.