

Nigeria's Dismal Tunnel: Is there an Exit?

*You, my fellow traveler and teacher
stood close, a far-away look
in your eyes, as if you listened
from ramparts two decades old,
in Mississippi of the roaring sixties.*

*You did campaign-speed to arrive
at the market square, loyal
to the sovereignty of mother-lore,
your childhood archipelago,
freedom's grit woven into your hair
by ancient seers who bid you tell
against loot-sharers who burn down silos
to clap with one hand in our houses of hunger.*
Odia Ofeimun¹

The assumption of the average Nigerian is that nothing actually works in this society anymore. Abiodun Komolafe ²

*All your plunder and gold leaf
only served to draw the thief.*³ Robert Lowell

*It may be when we no longer know what to do,
We have come to our real work,
And when we no longer know which way to go,
We have begun our real journey.*⁴ Wendell Berry

To Richard, who isn't going away. Femi Osofisan⁵

*For Richard Joseph...that our hopes and aspirations for that country, that continent, may yet defy odds and bear
fruition.* Biodun Jeyifo⁶

Our country's sad race towards anarchy. Pat Utomi⁷

Nigeria is fast drifting to a failed state...an unwholesome and insecure country. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo.⁸

¹ Excerpt from "To Richard Joseph at Sixty", *A Boiling Caracas and Other Poems* (Lagos: Hornbill House, 2008). Mr. Ofeimun is depicting my arrival in a public square in northern Nigeria in 1979 to observe a campaign rally of Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The reference to Mississippi is my involvement with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) and my relationship with Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer, the redoubtable Civil Rights leader. I spent the summer of 1967 in Ruleville, Mississippi, working with Mrs. Hamer and the MFDP.

² "Nigeria's 'room-and-parlour' politics," *The Nation* (Lagos), August 8, 2020.

³ "Central Park", *Robert Lowell's Poems: A Selection*, ed. by Jonathan Raban (London: Faber and Faber, 1974).

⁴ "Our Real Work", *Standing by Words* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1983).

⁵ Inscription by Prof. Osofisan in September 1979 in a copy of his play, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*, on my departure from the University of Ibadan.

⁶ Inscription by Prof. Jeyifo in October 2001 in his edited book, *Perspectives on Wole Soyinka: Freedom and Complexity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

⁷ "State of the Nation", *The Guardian* (Lagos), September 12, 2011.

⁸ *The Punch* (Lagos), September 14, 2020.

“Nothing works in Nigeria anymore.” Indeed, the Nigeria Project has not only stalled but, year after year, regressed. I agree with the late Professor Crawford Young that “charters for resurrection” in African states require new forms of collaboration. No single scholar or analyst, he said, has the answers. Nigeria is uniquely placed to be the initial focus of such collaboration and where a model of well-performing democratic government can eventually emerge.

Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka once stated that Nigeria was “too complex an entity”. There are several such entities in the post-colonial world, condemned to sectarianism and ethno-clientelism as the primary drivers of political alliances, governmental action, and access to basic services. When asked at a conference in Britain if Nigerians would be willing to die on the barricades to rescue the nation, Soyinka responded: “Nigerians are too intelligent to die on the barricades”. In view of the level of violent conflict and institutional erosion, barricades may not be too extreme an option.⁹

The first edition of Thomas Hodgkin’s *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* was published to coincide with Nigeria’s independence from colonial rule on October 1, 1960. The second edition appeared in 1975, ahead of my arrival to join the Faculty of the Social Sciences of the University of Ibadan at the end of February 1976. Hodgkin had introduced me to the study of African politics and supervised my doctoral research on the nationalist movement in the French trust territory of Cameroun.

Before compiling his anthology, Hodgkin considered a perplexing question: “What is the Nigerian ‘past’?” He gave the following response “What we are in fact concerned with is many pasts, not one – the past histories of the various peoples and civilizations that constitute modern Nigeria”. His book is, paradoxically, about an imagined past of a nation that had yet to be designed. Hodgkin also recognized that “Nigeria as a polity was an imperial, and specifically a British, construction”. Yet, he contended, “the contribution of Nigerian nationalists...to the development of the concept (however incompletely asserted or realized) of a Nigerian nation” should not be minimized. On the eve of its 60th anniversary

⁹ Nigerians have long used the expression, “our own state”, to convey how their families, neighborhoods, and communities took charge of fundamental duties – security, waste disposal, water and electricity provision – for which they once relied on municipal and other authorities. A term now commonly used by Nigerian scholars to refer to the decay of norms and institutions is “the Rot”.

on October 1, 2020, to refer to the “incomplete” realization of Nigeria as a political entity would be an understatement.¹⁰

Can the pronounced decline of Nigeria, six decades after acceding to independence, be reversed? This is a question of great significance for both its citizens and the world. I will refrain from relating the many travails and the distress of its people.¹¹ For the title of this paper, I returned to the notion of a “dismal tunnel” advanced by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the late political titan. He used it to describe military rule five years after the termination of the 1967-70 civil war.¹² Military regimes, Awolowo contended, should not design multifarious plans to re-order the economy and government. They should, instead, oversee competitive elections and transfer power to elected representatives.

My Nigeria journey began two weeks after the assassination of Head-of-State General Murtala Mohammed on February 13, 1976. General Olusegun Obasanjo took over the reins of government and oversaw a phased transition to constitutional democracy. Yet the politics of the Second Republic, like that of the First, was highly contentious. The government became so dysfunctional that military usurpers had little difficulty shunting it aside on December 31, 1983. They then proceeded to rule the nation, in different configurations, even longer than the 1966-79 regimes. After two decades of uninterrupted rule by elected governments, Nigeria finds itself again in a *dismal tunnel*: poverty-stricken and conflict ridden.¹³ Wendell Berry’s plaint - “We no longer know what to do...We no longer know

¹⁰ There are many of Hodgkin’s achievements that will be revisited, especially in light of his pioneering work on colonialism and nationalism. Not be overlooked is that his engagements in Africa from the late 1940s included efforts to provide university extension courses, and extramural studies, following models developed in the United Kingdom. See Michael Wolfers: *Thomas Hodgkin, Wandering Scholar: A Biography* (The Merlin Press, 2007). They are forerunners of concerns mentioned below to foster *Access to Knowledge*.

¹¹ Nigerian newspapers and other publications, most now available online, are replete with factual details and commentaries. Of particular note are the weekly columns by Prof. Ayo Olukotun in *Punch* and the insightful reports by Patrick Okigbo and others in *NexTier*.

¹² See Richard Joseph, “Nigeria: Inside the Dismal Tunnel”, *Current History*, vol. 95, no. 601 (May 1996). It was a surprise to note the title of the final book written by the late Stephen Ellis: *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹³ Since 2018, the World Poverty Clock has reported that Nigeria has the most poor people in the world. There is abundant information available online on the violent conflicts in several zones of the country and the large number of displaced persons. Nigeria is now one of four countries – the others are Yemen, Congo, and South Sudan – reported by the UN to be at risk of famine as a result of prolonged warfare, the pandemic, and economic distress. While the report focused on Nigeria’s northeast, high levels of violence and economic disruption elsewhere could accentuating food insecurity. See “U.N. warns famine risk has escalated amid virus,” *The New York Times*, September 6, 2020.

which way to go” – captures the perplexity regarding the fate of Africa’s most populous nation.¹⁴ Prof. Ayo Olukotun has expressed this dismay succinctly: “...who would not come close to tears when surveying the woes that have overtaken a country once full of vitality.”

Banditry in government is mirrored by banditry on the roadways. An arc of states from the northeast to the northwest is subjected to depredations by self-proclaimed jihadists and criminal gangs. State security forces and vigilante groups respond, often in comparable fashion. In parts of some states, such as Kaduna, life has become Hobbesian with repetitive mass killings.

John Campbell

It is fitting that former U.S. Ambassador John Campbell returned to wrestling with the Nigerian conundrum in a forthcoming book: *Nigeria and the Nation-State: Rethinking Diplomacy with the Postcolonial World*.¹⁵ I had the opportunity to read the manuscript and provided the following endorsement:

Nigeria, according to Campbell, is ‘big, important, and troubled’. Islands of authority are surrounded by seas of ungoverned spaces. At the heart of the Nigerian paradox is the persistence of a state that generates enormous benefits for elites while the population grows ever poorer. Campbell argues the need to “rethink Nigeria” and calls for decentralized approaches to its multiplying travails. His book will be keenly read by scholars, diplomats, and the general public. They will be intrigued by an analysis applicable to many postcolonial entities in which elite predation and popular insecurity are interwoven.

Campbell’s earlier book, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, was greeted with orchestrated outrage.¹⁶ Those were the days when “rebranding” Nigeria was considered an appropriate response to criticisms by overseas observers. Such illusions have faded. Nigeria has fallen so far from the brink that returning to it is hard to visualize. I have written about the Sisyphean nature of the Nigerian experience.¹⁷ An image of that boulder being hauled back up the cliff would provide fodder for the country’s cartoonists. More plausible is the call by Campbell, echoing others, to “rethink” the country.¹⁸

¹⁴ The Shehu Yar’Adua Foundation in Abuja, and its managing director, Mr. Jacqueline Farris, have recorded an important film on displacement and migration. Its title, “Scatter”, echoes Wendell Berry’s poem. As its predecessor, “Nowhere to Run” on environmental threats, it has been produced in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation.

¹⁵ Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020

¹⁶ Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011. An expanded edition was published in 2013.

¹⁷ *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1987; reissued 2014), p. 10

¹⁸ Campbell is not advocating what we will describe as “redesign”. “Rethink” for him is bringing external views of Nigeria into alignment with the entity that actually exists. “Re-design” has appeared under different rubrics such as

While a wide range of readers would benefit from Campbell's treatise, his prime audience is the community he knows best: diplomats and foreign policy experts. It is a mistake, he argues, to view Nigeria through the prism of the nation-state model. The reality is quite different. Campbell constructs his analysis on the analytical framework, prebendalism, which I advanced almost four decades ago?¹⁹ There have been several subsequent elaborations.²⁰ He has now coined the term "prebendal archipelago": the state consists of fragments dotted in an ocean of "ungoverned spaces". Campbell does not believe that Nigeria as such is ungoverned. Real capacity and authority can be found, he contends, not in Aso Villa, the site of the presidency, or in the legislative, judicial, and other components of the federal government²¹. Rather, power has seeped away from the capital, Abuja, to state governments and traditional, religious, and other institutions.²² Campbell's aim is to convey the true nature of the entity, Nigeria, with which external actors must perforce deal.

I look forward to the discussions that will ensue about *Nigeria and the Nation-State*. My reflections are limited to the "conceptualization" of Nigeria that is fundamental to the collaborative effort needed to *exit the dismal tunnel*.²³ Such collaboration was central to the political mobilization that brought an end to British colonial rule. Here are other key points from Campbell:

"Restructuring", "True Federalism", and even a "New Biafra" (and its equivalent in other regions). A particular focus has been on the creation of local, state, and regional security forces as confidence in federal police and other units has dwindled. What Campbell suggests is that such processes are already occurring incrementally and informally.

¹⁹ Initially in "Class, State, and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria", *Journal of Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3 (November, 1983).

²⁰ See "Africa's Predicament and Academe", *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 7, 2003; "Misgovernance and the African Predicament: Can the Code be Broken?" Faculty Distinguished Lecture No. 1, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, November 30, 2006. This talk was earlier delivered in October 2006 as my inaugural lecture as John Evans Professor of Political Science, Northwestern University. My epilogue to the edited volume by Wale Adebaniwi and Ebenezer Obadare is a succinct presentation of this theoretical framework. See "The Logic and Legacy of Prebendalism in Nigeria" in *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

²¹ It was once referred to as "Aso Rock". The change is felicitous and appropriate. "Dodan Barracks" was the similar center of military governments, conveying the essence of its authority.

²² I have attended such presentations, shared conference panels with Amb. Campbell, and also hosted him for such events along with other speakers – Wale Adebaniwi. Our first meeting took place when he was still serving as U.S. Ambassador. It was a briefing for participants in an academic conference in Abuja. It was unlike any other I have experienced in a diplomatic setting. The key members of the Embassy – responsible for political, economic, and cultural affairs – were summoned to summarize important developments in their areas of responsibility. The presentations were frank and substantive.

²³ For pertinent interrogations, see K. Amuwo, A. Agbaje, R. Suberu, and G. Hérault, *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1998); A. Jega and J. Farris, ed., *Nigeria at Fifty: Contributions to*

- *At independence, the Nigerian Project rested on shared ideals of democracy and constitutional government.*
- *Since independence, the formal state exists for, and is upheld by, prebendal elites.*
- *The federal government's raison d'être is to collect and distribute oil revenues.*
- *Nigeria's prebendal political system— based on corruption, private gain, and personal relationships—is the context in which external actors must operate.*
- *As the federal center weakened, power ebbed to the states and other sub-national authorities. This devolution is unlikely to be formalized as that would threaten the privileges and benefits of the elite cartel.*

Stanislav Andreski

Campbell book, as many others evoking these dilemmas, hark back to a provocative analysis of politics, society, and governance in postcolonial Africa. Four chapters in Stanislaw Andreski's, *The African Predicament: A Study in the Pathology of Modernisation*, have proven prescient: "Kleptocracy or Corruption as a System of Government", "From Colonial to Post-Colonial Authoritarianism", "The Emergent Class Structures", and the "Circulation of Elites". Some of the discussion is idiosyncratic, written in Andreski's muckraking style, which he brought to a wide range of subjects.²⁴ However, at a time when many African countries had recently witnessed the flags of former colonial powers taken down in colorful ceremonies, Andreski identified dynamics that would stall development: the emergence of self-serving elites, manipulated elections, autocratic rule, and kleptocracy.

Decades after the publication of Andreski's treatise, every new entrant to the list of independent African nations has confirmed his predictions. It seems to make no difference that South Africa and South Sudan achieved political freedom after years of valiant struggle. The *Andreski Shadow* eventually extended over them. Social and cultural norms have often become so degraded that programs intended to help the destitute, and provide relief from the Covid pandemic - whether in South Sudan, northern Nigeria, South Africa, or Kenya - are distorted to benefit the privileged and politically connected.²⁵

Robert Rotberg

Peace, Democracy, and Development (Abuja: Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation, 2010); and Ebenezer Obadare and Wale Adebani, ed., *Nigeria at Fifty: The Nation in Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁴ They include military organization, Latin American societies, and comparative sociology.

²⁵ On the appalling diversion of relief food and other relief intended to palliate the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown in South Africa, see Lynsey Chutel, "Relief Efforts Entangled in Corruption Scandals," *New York Times*, August 20, 2020. Similar reports are available on the other countries mentioned.

At a meeting of the Nigerian Bar Association in Abuja in January 2013, Dr. Obiageli Ezekweseli, a former Federal Minister of Education and World Bank vice-president, made remarks that would not have surprised her audience. An estimated “\$400 billion of Nigeria’s oil revenue”, she said, “has been stolen or misused since the country’s independence in 1960”.²⁶ Over 80% of these revenues (that account for 90% of export earnings) “ended up in the hands of one percent of the population.” Moreover, “as much as 20% of the entire capital expenditure [of government] will end up in private pockets annually.” Crucial to exiting the dismal tunnel is transforming this entrenched kleptocracy.

Books on corruption appear regularly.²⁷ On this occasion, I will focus on one by Robert Rotberg entitled, *The Corruption Cure: How Citizens & Leaders Can Combat Graft*.²⁸ As a longtime scholar of Africa, I expected his study would feature the continent’s experiences. Also, that he would pull together in his concluding chapter – “Curing Corruption: Lessons, Methods, and Best Practices” – the panoply of theories, experiments, and findings covered in the almost three hundred pages that preceded it.

Rotberg is given to lofty affirmations:

- beating back the merchants of entrenched mendacity can indeed be accomplished.
- the goal to be pursued is “ethical universalism”.
- leaders can provide the kinds of behavioral integrity and behavioral bright lines that, over time, shift prevailing political cultures from acceptance of corruption to its rejection.
- Whole societies, not their various parts, must be transformed if ethical universalism and a norm of non-corruption are to prevail.

Rotberg is also taken with the metaphor of corruption as an infection whose cure requires “strengthening the immune system...of entire political cultures.” More concretely, he identifies new tools that electronic technologies are bringing to combat corruption. I would add the following

²⁶ She also claimed that \$67 billion in the Foreign Reserve and Excess Crude Account had been misappropriated during the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, *The Vanguard*, January 29, 2013.

²⁷ G. Blundo, J-P Olivier de Sardan, et al., *Everyday Corruption and the State: Citizens & Public Officials in Africa* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2006); Michela Wrong, *It’s Our Turn to Eat: The Story of Kenyan Whistle-Blower* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Daniel Jordan Smith, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Wale Adebawale, *A Paradise for Maggots: The Story of a Nigerian Anti-Graft Czar* (Nigeria, 2010), re-issued as *Authority Stealing: Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2012); and Tom Burgis, *The Looting Machine: Warlords, Oligarchs, Smugglers, and the Theft of Africa’s Wealth* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015).

²⁸ Princeton University Press, 2017.

observation to this important point: We are on the threshold of exploiting these capacities in light of the rapid advances being made, the empowerment of individual actors, the creativity of young persons, and the latter's proclivity to work collectively and innovatively. Among international instruments, Rotberg highlights the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) which casts a wide net. Fraudulent actors can become trapped because, since the Act covers the American banking system, its global tentacles are difficult to evade. His proposal for the creation of an International Anti-Corruption Court, that could investigate, judge, and punish those who "orchestrate grand corruption endeavors in weak states lacking independent judiciaries", would face major impediments.

The U.N. established "Commission Against Impunity" in Guatemala that investigates, indicts, and prosecutes "venal fraud" is also difficult to see being emulated in Africa. An intrusive but short-lived effort to ensure financial integrity was implemented in Liberia after the ending of the brutal hostilities of the 1990s. The government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was so dependent on overseas funding that donors could insist on a semi-colonial arrangement to oversee the disbursement of aid funds. However, Liberia soon returned to its familiar prebendal ways of conducting public affairs.

The two prominent African cases of transformative government that Rotberg cites – Botswana under its first Prime Minister Sir Seretse Khama, and post-genocide Rwanda under Paul Kagame and the Rwanda Patriotic Front – illustrate his major determining factors: a decisive leader (one democratic, the other autocratic) and the capacity to have a societal impact across an entire nation. It would be difficult to replicate these models in any but a handful of contemporary African countries.²⁹ It is not surprising, therefore, that he cites few examples. The main value of Rotberg's book lies in the abundant information he has distilled about corruption and approaches to combat it. The "real work" and the "real journey" in contemporary Africa, however, require getting outside familiar boxes of corrupt practices and attempts to curtail them.

Monica Prasad

Such a search is reflected in the work of Monica Prasad, a leading scholar of corruption. In response to my request, she prepared a summary of her ideas and an approach she calls "Islands of Integrity."³⁰ Here are key points:

²⁹ Examples are Mauritius, Cape Verde, and Gambia.

³⁰ The text of "A Proposal for Anti-Corruption Reform" is available at <https://www.africacli.org/prasad>.

- Despite decades of anti-corruption efforts, bureaucratic corruption has proven remarkably durable throughout the developing world.
- Bureaucratic corruption—the use of public office for personal gain—stifles economic growth, engenders mistrust in public institutions, increases inequality and poverty, and undermines democratization.
- Historical scholarship has shown that when corruption was rife in western countries, examples existed of government agencies that were not corrupt, such as the excise bureau in 18th century Britain, and the United States Postal Service at the turn of the 20th century.
- In many countries, corruption is not a problem of individual deviance from the system. Rather, corruption *is* the system, and everyone participates to some degree.
- Even highly corrupt societies may be dotted with “islands of integrity”—organizations that are corruption-free. Present-day examples include the Kenya Tea Development Authority; Senegal’s Ministry of Finance’s Directorate of Economic and Financial Cooperation and the Directorate of Statistics and Forecasting; Ghana’s Policy Analysis and Research Division; the Indian Institutes of Technology; and other examples in countries across the developing world.
- Organizations, not countries, are the locus where the “big bang” [transforming corruption] can be implemented. Organizations have formal and informal cultures that, while engaged with the broader culture, often retain significant autonomy. Moreover, an organization is a sub-system that it may be possible to change through a concerted “big push,” if an organizational leader can be found committed to enacting reform.
- Even within countries known for widespread corruption, certain organizations can be relatively free of corruption. This suggests an appealing strategy for controlling corruption by creating single organizations within a society that are relatively corruption-free —variously called “islands of integrity,” “islands of excellence,” “pockets of effectiveness,” “positive outliers,” and “interstitial bureaucracies”.
- A focus on organizations provides a way to attack the problem on multiple fronts, but on a more manageable scale. In the long term, as more of these islands are created, the culture of an entire country could be changed.
- This approach can be tested in African countries in which some organizations are infused with mechanisms learned from other “islands of integrity”, while others serve as a control group. The results can then be compared.

Monica Prasad and her collaborators have generated important insights on moving beyond “severely corrupt societies” in the developing world. Organizations of integrity do exist in Nigeria in different

sectors, and even as nodes within government, educational, and health institutions. Yet they are awash in a sea of corrupt and nepotistic practices.

I have listened to presentations by Prof. Prasad and read her publications, singly- and jointly-authored. There are many hurdles to overcome in applying her suggestions to Africa. First is the notion of “islands”. Islands are what the name connotes: separate and often isolated entities. There are organizations that exist over extended periods that demonstrate high levels of integrity among their personnel. How such “islands of integrity” can cohere and evolve into larger webs that can shape prevailing norms is a question to be answered.³¹ There is a leap between two of Prasad’s statements. The first is plausible: *“A focus on organizations provides a way to attack the problem on multiple fronts, but on a more manageable scale.”* Even with such an effort, however, what would follow is not assured: *“In the long term, as more of these islands are created, the culture of an entire country could be changed.”* There is an assumption of quantity turning into quality. Where in Africa has such a process occurred? Where has the “culture of corruption” not been transformative of the “islands of integrity” rather than the reverse? Nigerian scholars and analysts could respond to such questions with specific studies and report on the transformative changes that Prasad suggests.

Difficult to achieve also is the maintenance of boundaries between the internal functioning of such organizations and the unremitting pressures from family, friends, kinfolk, associates, and others for access to the financial and other resources of such organizations. Here, for example, is an alternative to the experiment Prasad proposes. Organizations in different sectors with relatively high levels of observable integrity can be identified. They can be subjected to a detailed survey to determine the factors responsible for their relative integrity. In addition to distilling the mechanisms at work, questions to be explored are: How sustainable are these characteristics? How transferable are they? Can they persist if the scale of organization increases? The overall question to be posed in Nigeria and other African countries is how can transformation take place from what Bo Rothstein calls *“severely corrupt environments”* to societies whose institutions are characterized by *“sustainable capacity and integrity”*? The answers to this fundamental challenge cannot be determined from outside, or by simply applying

³¹ Goran Hyden, in his early work on postcolonial East Africa, conjectured that an emerging business class could play a disciplining role regarding the state. The interaction of business groups and state entities and their policies in Nigeria was very revealing in a joint study by Abimbola Agboluaje, Kelly Spence, and me. See “Corporate Social Responsibility and Late-Comer Industrialization in Nigeria” in Charlotte Walker-Said and John D. Kelly, *Corporate Social Responsibility? Human Rights in the New Global Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.)

mechanisms that have been adopted elsewhere. Prasad provides important ideas to consider. There is likely to be a variety of helpful *approaches* rather than one that is universally applicable in Africa

Capacity is as important a consideration as Integrity. Indeed, they are interwoven. The “capacity to build capacity” is a notion I first heard during a sustained exercise in policy development and action in Nigeria.³² My preferred notion is *Institutions of Capacity and Integrity*. Such institutions *do* exist in Nigeria and other African countries. They are found especially in the sphere of traditional/customary systems, in faith-based entities, and in artistic communities. These communities would not be sustainable, and able to attract and retain the affiliation of members, were it not for the combining of capacity and integrity. Inherent to them are the “trust networks” of which Charles Tilly wrote. There are also arenas of small-scale economic activities in which systems of self-management have evolved. They incorporate norms of transparency and accountability. Examples are lorry and carparks for commercial vehicles and open-air markets where the risk of pilferage is high. There are others that can be identified and their modes of assuring a certain level of capacity and integrity studied.

An unusual and unexpected commentary arrived in my email inbox when the above section was being written. It is so germane to this exercise, and so authoritatively expressed, that it was given immediate consideration.



³² Research Alliance to Combat HIV/AIDS (REACH), 2005-2011.

Hafsat Abiola³³

On August 23, Nigerian civic activist and state government official Hafsat Abiola posted a brief but insightful comment on a listserv.³⁴ Her remarks inspired me to reread presentations I had made at the Chinua Achebe Colloquium on Africa (Brown University) on March 31, 2012, and my Guest Lecture at the launching of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP) on February 1-2, 2016. Here is the text of Ms. Abiola's statement. It is then parsed and followed by my comments in italics, many taken from the aforementioned talks:

Before we discuss how to change a poor performing democratic government, we should reflect on our chances of getting strong performing ones. Where are the centers of enlightened thinking to be found in our countries that can supply us with a critical mass of people that can serve in government such that they will use the state to advance development? Are there such centers or are enlightened, service-oriented minds scattered around like flickering lights easily lost in the larger darkness? It is hard to win at development or to generate a developmental state working through individual reformers when the project itself is a team effort. The state system we have adopted, by and large, is poorly suited to our society, and easy to press into service for cabals, internal and external. It will be hard not to be poor performing. We should begin with the design.³⁵

- A) Before we discuss how to change a poor performing democratic government, we should reflect on our chances of getting strong performing ones.

The theme of the ISGPP 2016 conference was: "Getting Government to Work". It echoes the first chapter – "A Democracy that Works" – of my 1987 book: Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria. Despite the global authoritarian upsurge, Africa's most populous country has reaffirmed its democratic commitments. Rejected is the argument that Africa cannot achieve inclusive growth and development via democratic institutions. More thought and effort should be invested in improving institutions, especially those of government, and generating better policy outcomes.

- B) Where are the centers of enlightened thinking to be found in our countries that can supply us with a critical mass of people that can serve in government such that they will use the state to advance development?

Nigeria possesses, at home and abroad, an abundance of human capital. The question I posed in the Achebe Colloquium, was "whether Nigeria's formidable intellectual, institutional, cultural, and economic resources will be harnessed to tackle the overlapping challenges of growth, democracy, and security". "There is currently no effort" I said, foreshadowing Ms. Abiola, "to address these overlapping issues by any think tank." Today, in addition to strengthening "centers of enlightened thinking", I believe a network

³³ H. Abiola and R. Joseph. Drawing by Randi M. Joseph (the author's 15-year grandniece). It is based on a photograph taken in Lagos.

³⁴ Created and managed by Prof. Ayo Olukotun.

³⁵ Ms. Abiola's note of August 23, 2020 was prompted by a comment on the listserv advocating military rule in Africa, after the overthrow of the government of Mali on August 18. She is the founder-director of KIND (Kudirat Initiative for Democracy) and has served as Special Adviser to the government of Ogun State in southwest Nigeria. She is the daughter of Moshood Abiola who was elected president of Nigeria in 1993. He was blocked from assuming office by members of the military regime – led by General Ibrahim Babangida – an act which catapulted Nigeria into profound turmoil. Abiola's imprisonment, and death in detention, coincided with unprecedented political repression under the regime of General Sani Abacha, 1993-1998. The decade of political liberalization globally was a time of "democracy as deception" in Nigeria, as I wrote in the Foreword to Olatunji Dare, *Diary of a Debacle: Tracking Nigeria's Failed Democratic Transition, 1989-1994* (Ibadan: Agbo Areo Publishers, 2010).

approach should be considered. Even where such centers exist, “the critical mass” Ms. Abiola refers to requires greatly enhancing their impact through collaboration.³⁶

- C) Are there such centers or are enlightened, service-oriented minds scattered around like flickering lights easily lost in the larger darkness?

“The larger darkness” is another name for “the dismal tunnel”. The lights of “service-oriented minds” do flicker, but their urgent message is S.O.S.³⁷

- D) It is hard to win at development, or to generate a developmental state working through individual reformers, when the project itself is a team effort.

Amen.

- E) The state system we have adopted, by and large, is poorly suited to our society, and easy to press into service for cabals, internal and external. It will be hard not to be poor performing.

Peter Ekeh, in his magisterial essay on Africa’s Two Publics, described the contrasting norms between the state system, inherited from colonial powers, and those of endogenous authorities.³⁸ This duality was also articulated by Richard Sklar in his eloquent essay on “dual majesty” in Africa.³⁹ There are several Nigerian scholars of the post-Ekeh generation, such as Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, who have carried forward this line of inquiry. This perspective reappears in John Campbell’s vision of power seeping away from federal authorities to local state and non-state institutions.

Roger Myerson, a Nobel Laureate in Economics at the University of Chicago, is exploring why governance in Africa has been so weak. In seeking an answer, he is examining how colonial administrations were able to improve infrastructure and service delivery while their successors – although enjoying much greater legitimacy - have failed for the large part to do so. The repetition of this pattern suggests that the dichotomies described by Ekeh, Sklar, and others should be re-examined in a more sustained way.

- F) We should **begin with the design.**

For Campbell’s “rethink” Nigeria, I wrote “redesign”. Several years ago, I contacted scholars of the Design School of Stanford University to suggest a design initiative regarding Nigeria. Today, “design” is a major endeavor on many university campuses. It has even served for competitions involving teams from various countries. Youths, in their early teens and beyond, are using coding and other computer skills to become innovative designers. The profound political, economic, and security challenges in Nigeria, and other African countries, have made rethinking the design of territories carved out by imperial and colonial powers an important priority.

³⁶ I made the case for a Network for the Study of Governance and Development in my keynote address to the African Economic Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in December 2017. It was re-asserted in a commissioned paper written for the African Development Bank in 2019.

³⁷ In a conversation with a leading Nigeria policy scholar several months, in discussing the appalling situation throughout the country’s northern region, he said that an “intervention” may be necessary. The term surprised me. I told him he would need to think of a different expression because the word signifies what has gone tragically wrong in the Middle East. I recall that conversation here to convey the dismay of many Nigerians as the level of insecurity has reached an abysmal level.

³⁸ “Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 17, no. 1 (January 1975).

³⁹ “The African Frontier for Political Science” in R. H. Bates, V. Y. Mudimbe, and J O’Barr, ed., *Africa and the Disciplines* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

After many years of immersion in African studies, and the publication of seminal works on state systems, the late Crawford Young called for “charters of resurrection” to be developed collaboratively. Matthew Page called in 2018 for “a conceptual change agenda” after tracking how Africa’s wealth is siphoned away by its own elites. Ayo Olukotun, who wrestles week after week with Nigeria’s travails, recently called for a new “development matrix”. Whatever terms are used, and however it is ultimately defined, redesign is at the top of the Nigerian agenda.

Stanislav Andreski, “Is There A Way Out?”

In the final chapter of *The African Predicament*, Andreski asked if there was an exit from the deplorable systems in which much of postcolonial was becoming trapped. Reading Andreski is not a pleasurable experience. Much of what he says is impressionistic, repetitive, and dated. Particularly annoying is his Malthusian *idée fixe* about population growth.⁴⁰ Yet Andreski discerned the essential features of Africa’s predicament. His primary contentions have held up for a half-century. As with the authors discussed above, this chapter impelled me to reread my earlier presentations. Particularly relevant is the *Kronti Ne Akwamu* lecture delivered at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development on January 25, 2007.⁴¹

Andreski Summations

- There’s no quick way to make African states replicas of the wealthy countries of the northern hemisphere.
- Given the ethnic frictions and all-pervading venality, every extension of governmental control raises the stakes and, therefore, intensifies the struggle for power.
- Foreign aid ...its wise administration presents insuperable difficulties ...corruption and inefficiency are obstacles to effective coordination...External funds are no substitute for internal reform and may even aggravate the situation.
- The habits conducive to efficient organization and high productivity have nowhere struck roots. They were cultivated in northern Europe and America for centuries in small shops and businesses before being applied on a large scale. It is “...a matter of values, principles and feelings which must be imbibed from the environment at the most impressionable age...”
- “...the West African business class was developing after independence.” Many small businessmen without political connections and too poor to afford adequate bribes, however, were ruined and ownership of capital concentrated in the hands of the ruling cliques.⁴²
- “Arbitrary fiscality and corrupting licensing worked for the benefit of parasitic officials and politicians.”
- “Ivory Coast is the only country in the entire continent which can be said to be progressing.”
- Houphouët-Boigny stands out among African leaders. He is skeptical that “a new undeveloped state” can become democratic in a few years. To Nkrumah’s “politics first”, he responded with “economics first”.

⁴⁰ Andreski’s use of terms such as “parasitism”, drawn from his Latin American studies, would be considered tendentious and, at worse, racist.

⁴¹ “Ghana and Democratic Development in Africa: Back to the Future”, CDD- Ghana publication, 2007.

⁴² This sentence is reflected in Barack Obama’s narrative of the travails of his Kenyan father.

- “Within the limits of what is possible under present circumstances, the government of the Ivory Coast comes closer than any other to what is desirable...the only other country where wealth has grown faster than population is South Africa”.
- “Give Houphouët-Boigny government credit for the unique achievement of being no less efficient than the colonial rulers in promoting material welfare.”⁴³
- It is not evident that a gradual and slow transition from the colonial situation to independence is a bad thing.⁴⁴
- Houphouët-Boigny can let Africanization take its natural course rather than force its pace.
- Ivory Coast shows the merit of gradualness and building on traditional foundations.
- ***The weak point is that when Houphouët-Boigny goes, a struggle for power may flare up and destroy what has been achieved.***

Left out of the summations are Andreski’s other pessimistic, but often realistic, views: the ill-effects of incorporating dynamic regions within large and dysfunctional entities, as Katanga in the Congo; the venality of military officers, who seize power, that does not differ from that of their civilian predecessors; and the many bureaucratic failures and deleterious consequences of rapid population growth. The African postcolonial state is unlikely to be the driver of sustained development as Kwame Nkrumah and most African leaders postulated. Private business development would be the key motor of growth but it is hindered by predatory bureaucracies, an emergent class that captures investible capital, and the decay of norms and cultural practices necessary for economic prosperity. Ivory Coast, under the leadership of Felix Houphouët-Boigny, has outperformed other African countries for several reasons: his pro-capitalist approach; his preference for gradualism over radical change; and the alliance he forged between government, traditional chieftaincies, the emergent business class, and France.⁴⁵

Again demonstrating his prescience, Andreski forecast the likely political fate of Ivory Coast: *The weak point is that when Houphouët-Boigny goes, a struggle for power may flare up and destroy what has been achieved.* In an address delivered in Ghana in January 2007 - the country that Andreski felt was on the wrong path of political development - I said: “For several years now, the country with the second largest

⁴³ This observation is pertinent to Roger Myerson’s current investigations, as mentioned above.

⁴⁴ The double negative reflects Andreski’s difficulty with harping incessantly on his pessimistic views.

⁴⁵ Ties with France were military, the retention of French citizens in the government, and the latter’s participation in a range of economic activities.

economy in West Africa, namely Côte d'Ivoire, has been rent in two as a consequence of the failed transition from paternalistic autocracy to constitutional democracy." The Ivoirian economy had grown rapidly but then stuttered. Meanwhile, its political system remained in the shrink-wrap Houphouët-Boigny had wound around it. After his death, each of his immediate successors – included his longtime arch-critic Laurent Gbagbo – governed abysmally.⁴⁶

The compact that Houphouët-Boigny established with the more economically-backward northern region, and Upper Volta (subsequently Burkina Faso) - and the protective umbrella his regime provided for many migrants from these zones - unraveled.⁴⁷ Contests to succeed him catapulted the country into civil war. His former Finance Minister, Alassane Ouattara, who reclaimed his electoral victory with the assistance of foreign and international forces in 2011, restored a precarious stability. Social discontent, however, has been persistent and peace possibly endangered by his pursuit of a third electoral mandate.⁴⁸

An important contention by Andreski can be plucked from the many listed in his book's conclusion. One of them is: "The habits conducive to efficient organization and high productivity have nowhere struck roots". The first part of the sentence is important; the last four words, "nowhere struck roots", are demonstrably wrong. In fact, these habits are evident in several sectors in African societies, as mentioned above. Moreover, any strategy to advance transformational change must tap into endogenous resources in organization and productivity.

In my January 2007 Accra lecture, attention was devoted to the distinction made by Bruce Bergman between two forms of trust: one "abstract, impersonal, and universalistic" and the other "normative and collaborative". Bergman believed that the latter characterized socio-economic relations in Ghana as reflected in kinship ties and other identities. Yet the building and maintaining of institutions of the modern state and economy, he claims, rely on the other form of trust. "Ties of family, ethnicity, and

⁴⁶ Former Prof. Gbagbo went from inspiring social-democratic opposition leader, to inciter of ethnic hostilities as president, to head of a government under siege during the civil war, to imprisonment in The Hague for human rights abuses. A dismaying trajectory.

⁴⁷ Many of these migrants worked as agriculture laborers in the commercial plantations.

⁴⁸ This issue has undermined peace in several countries since the return to elected governments starting in 1989. Presidents facing constitutional limitations on their terms of office seek to retain their positions via contested interpretations of these provisions. Despite significant economic growth since Ouattara assumed the presidency, almost half the population lives in poverty.

religion”, he contended, overwhelm those of abstract universal citizenship whose values are particularly displayed in a professional civil service.”

Bergman’s views overlap with observations made by Alex de Waal who wrote of the “regressive dynamics” in “governance, institution-building, state-formation, and economic performance”. Many African countries, de Waal claimed, were regressing to simpler forms of organization. The reliance on personalist forms of obligation and exchange made it difficult to establish and sustain “complex institutions”. In this regard, his arguments coincide with those of Bergman. They also resonate because I have witnessed – especially during decades of engagement with Nigeria - how this regression has impacted the quality of lives of many, even in formerly well-performing institutions like the University of Ibadan.⁴⁹

A personal anecdote can be inserted here. I once asked a visiting Nigerian scholar at Northwestern University, if he had a choice, what would be the first thing he would do to start reversing the downward slide in his country. He promptly replied: “I would bring back the railways.” That made me think: there *were* railways. What happened to them? Several years ago, an effort was started to resurrect the country’s defunct railways, with a focus on the service heading north from Lagos to Ibadan and further northward, and between the northern city of Kaduna and the capital, Abuja. These projects were delayed when controversy erupted with the state-linked Chinese companies that had contracted to finance and perform the construction work. Because of the prebendal logics discussed earlier, such major infrastructure projects either never get off the drawing board, are poorly performed, or are replaced by simpler “fixes”.⁵⁰

Exit by Design: Nigerian Journeys⁵¹

Anyone who consults the volume, *Issues in the Nigerian Constitution* - containing the proceedings of a March 1977 conference - would not be surprised by the list of prominent politicians, academics, and

⁴⁹ In some ways, the situation is more dire in the first country I studied closely, Cameroon. It has known virtually one regime, and two leaders, over six decades: the ruling party, *Cameroon People’s Democratic Movement* (with name changes), and Ahmadu Ahidjo and Paul Biya.

⁵⁰ A case in point concerns plans to construct a monorail in Lagos in the 1980s. Sued in an overseas court for failing to meet its contractual obligations, the government ended up paying hundreds of millions in compensation. Nigerians were forced to continue relying on road transport in a highly congested city.

⁵¹ Borrowed from Tim Brown, *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

civic activists who participated.⁵² They would also not be surprised by the title of the first presentation, “National Objectives and Public Accountability”, or perhaps by the name of the presenter, R. A. Joseph, so much has he been involved in the intellectual life of the country. The fact that he had first arrived in Nigeria just a year earlier, however, should be surprising. At the time of the great design of Nigeria’s Second Republic, therefore, I was inducted into the intellectual community of the nation and have remained there ever since.

As Hafsati Abiola states, design is again on the Nigerian agenda. The country no longer functions just sub-optimally but in ways that are detrimental to the wellbeing of most of its citizens. There are, as she asserts, *“enlightened, service-oriented minds scattered around like flickering lights easily lost in the larger darkness”*. Indeed, Nigeria – counting its citizens at home and abroad – possesses more of such “minds” than most countries in the less-developed world. How can they be brought together to constitute the *“critical mass of people that can serve in government such that they will use the state to advance development?”* I will expand “serve in government” to “positively serve society and the nation in their respective institutions”.

I was intrigued by ideas put forward by David Brooks, the noted author, media commentator, and columnist.⁵³ “We’re clearly heading”, he wrote, “into an age of brilliant technology”. The rapid advance of computers, and Internet firms that grew along with them, reward “procedural architects.” The architecture they create allows “loose networks of soloists to collaborate”. Consequently, *“a decentralized network” can be organized “around a clear question”*. This paper poses a clear question: “How Can Nigeria Exit the Dismal Tunnel?” It is a big question and a big challenge. I have witnessed, and participated in confronting, others in my lifetime. How will colonial rule be brought to an end? How will apartheid be defeated? How will racial segregation in the United States be overcome? How will Nigeria and other African countries exit the Dismal Tunnel of predatory rule? The latter challenge requires as much determination and perseverance as the others.

⁵² Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1977. The focus of the meeting was on the draft constitution produced by a Constitution Drafting Committee.

⁵³ “What Machines Can’t Do,” *The New York Times*, February 4, 2014.

In August 2006, in a lecture delivered as a U.S. senator at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, Barack Obama called this challenge: “The Fight of Our Time”. This adversary, that Biodun Jeyifo appropriately titled, “The Predators’ Republic”, is winning.⁵⁴

As with all major political and social transformations, “a critical mass of people” must emerge and their efforts coalesce into an irresistible force.⁵⁵ “Flickering lights” can be “easily lost in the greater darkness”. They can also be brought together to form a mighty beam. When such moments arrive, however, the forces for democracy and social justice can still be defeated. This was the case in Hungary in 1956, in Tiananmen Square in 1989, and in Tahrir Square, Egypt, in 2011. The reverse, however, occurred in Nigeria in 1993-1998. The military government, under the command of General Sani Abacha, took the reins from a dithering leader of the junta, General Ibrahim Babangida. His regime then proceeded to install a ruthless tyranny. The lights of resistance could have been extinguished as the regime had access to substantial financial resources from oil exports, and the leverage this, and other factors, gave Nigeria to discourage foreign intervention. The popular movement for human rights and democracy, however, proved resilient. It attracted timely strategic assistance from external allies. The resistance persisted long enough to enable associates of the tyrant, perhaps for their self-protection, to engineer his demise.⁵⁶

From this hard-won success, lessons can be extracted on how Nigerians can coalesce across ethnic, regional, religious, and ideological lines to confront an existential challenge to the nation. The core question during the Abacha years was clear: Which road would the country pursue: towards constitutional democracy or brutal dictatorship?⁵⁷ In the January 2007 CDD-Accra lecture, the challenges posed by the “rough road to democracy” were explored.⁵⁸ Although the key focus was on Ghana, and its

⁵⁴ Mauritius and Cape Verde are countries that come to mind. There may be others of which I am unaware. Namibia has made progress following a long struggle to wrest independence from South Africa. Contentious politics characterized the aftermath. It could provide evidence of progress in state, governance, and development. Available indexes, such as that of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, could help in identifying outliers.

⁵⁵ The current struggle to remove a post-Soviet autocracy in Belarus is an example. Lebanon, mired in a corrupt sectarian system, is another. Hong Kong’s attempts to preserve its democracy and autonomy may be squelched.

⁵⁶ Among the relevant works on these episodes, see Olatunji Dare, *Diary of a Debacle: Omo Omoruyi, The Tale of June 12: The Betrayal of the Democratic Rights of Nigerians, 1993* (Press Alliance Network, Ltd., 1999); and Kayode Fayemi, *Out of the Shadows: Exile and the Struggle for Freedom and Democracy in Nigeria* (Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2005).

⁵⁷ Prof. Peter Ekeh once bewailed Nigeria’s “fractured response to tyranny”. That was certainly exhibited to a certain extent in the “June 12” struggle to “actualize” the electoral mandate of Moshood Abiola in the 1993 presidential election. But the deliberate pitting of Nigerians across sectional lines did not ultimately succeed. A national movement, though propelled from the southwest, triumphed over such divisions.

⁵⁸ “Rough road to democracy” is taken from the keynote address of Prof. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan at the Conference on African Renewal, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, March 6-9, 1997.

impending 50th anniversary on March 6, 2007, the field of vision was wider and included Nigeria and other African countries. It was obvious that democratic transitions in Africa since 1989 were not yielding developmental states and inclusive economic growth. Some pertinent excerpts:

- Which African countries will break the shackles of poor governance, weak institutions, and low performance?
- Formal liberal democracy must be wedded to state-building and employment-generating economic growth.

Two colleagues whose concerns overlapped with mine were quoted: Professor Gyimah-Boadi: “How did African states come to this level of decay?” “At the heart of Africa’s developmental failures has been the failure to establish coherent, capable, and legitimate states.”

Professor Eghosa Osaghae: “the absence of normal states able to guarantee their people the basic securities of life and property.”

The questions posed in Accra in January 2007 are similar to the ones raised today regarding Nigeria, although the challenges in the latter are greater: “What would be a truly transformational project in Ghana after the jubilations of March 2007 [independence celebrations]?” Although Ghana has persisted as a stable democracy and can assure its people, unlike Nigeria, “the basic securities of life and property”, it has not fully severed “the shackles of poor governance, weak institutions, and low performance”.

Collaborative Learning and Conceptual Change

Two years ago, the outline of a *Collaborative Learning Initiative* was shared with colleagues. Dr. Matthew Page responded with important observations and recommendations:

What sets this initiative apart is the commitment to deepening ties between African and non-African institutions and making them more seamless and routine. There is a need to make this case to U.S. institutions - lobbying them to digitize/provide open access, creating relationships with African institutions, prioritizing partnerships and academic exchanges, and putting their resources behind these efforts. In other words, harnessing academic institutions own resources and pushing for a conceptual change in how they operate could yield huge long-term dividends.

Matthew Page brings unique qualifications to this endeavor. After years of service in the U.S. State Department, he retired to devote himself to research and writing. With affiliations at three research centers – Centre for Democracy and Development (Abuja, Nigeria), Chatham House (London), and the

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Washington, DC), he quickly made a mark by producing important studies of the transfer of wealth by African elites to overseas financial institutions, real estate, and other investments. Tackling the huge challenges confronting African nations requires expanding the academic and intellectual resources available to them. In place of the small-scale initiatives occasionally introduced that often peter out after a few years, he sees the need for “deepening ties between African and non-African institutions.” I strongly agree.

Dr. Page contends that this “conceptual change” must include how such institutions operate and how they view the resources available to them. “Harnessing academic institutions own resources and pushing for a conceptual change in how they operate could yield huge long-term dividends.” This was the key message of my March 2003 essay, “Africa’s Predicament and Academe”, and the inaugural address at Northwestern University and the University of Ibadan in 2006: “Misgovernance and the African Predicament: Can the Code be Broken”? There are minimal signs that this challenge has been taken up seriously.⁵⁹

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced changes in educational systems, from elementary schools to colleges and universities. Remote learning, once an adjunct to in-person/classroom instruction, is being rapidly improved to meet current challenges. Some of these advances will persist and become routinized. In brief, this is a moment when knowledge can become more of a global commons, and knowledge building more of a global pursuit. The challenges raised by M. Prasad, H. Abiola, and M. Page can be taken up by “networks of soloists who collaborate...around a clear question”. Indeed such collaboration is occurring in innumerable places. New commercial entities are emerging to harness the capacity to generate answers to many questions, within industry for example, that would previously be arduous and slow to achieve.

In some respects, as Thomas Friedman argues, the world is flatter, but for peoples who with endogenous capacities to seize the opportunities. A striking example is Vietnam which moved in a handful of decades from devastation to become one of the fastest growing countries in the world. In Nigeria and most other African countries, the opposite has been the case: the regressive dynamics of

⁵⁹ *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 7, 2003; Faculty Distinguished Lecture, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, 30 November 2006. The latter was presented earlier as an inaugural lecture for a professorial chair in the Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences of Northwestern University.

which Alex de Waal wrote have prevailed. Operations that were once conducted with reasonable efficiency have eroded.⁶⁰

Enhancing Institutions of Capacity and Integrity

The multiyear initiative I recommend to begin reversing this cycle is “Enhancing Institutions of Capacity and Integrity” (E.I.C.I.).⁶¹ It would be knowledge-based and focused on learning, both internally in Africa (Nigeria to begin with) and from the experiences of other countries. As mentioned above, I have often emphasized the foundational work to be done in academic and research institutions. This case was made in my 2003 essay on “Africa’s Predicament and the Academy” and the 2006 lecture, “Misgovernance and the African Predicament: Can the Code be Broken?”

The Code of Misgovernance is known. Attention and efforts should now be directed to writing new codes, new algorithms, and designing new institutional software and hardware. The model for the E.I.C.I. is suggested by the ideas cited earlier from David Brooks: “an architecture...which allowed loose networks of soloists to collaborate”; “a decentralized network around a clear question”. Indeed, such a network was envisioned in a commissioned paper prepared for the African Development Bank in 2019, and the Africa Collaborative Learning Initiative designed with current and former students of Northwestern University.⁶²

Principles and Priorities

It is now recognized that Africans should have access to the artworks taken forcibly and/or deceptively from the continent by imperial and colonial powers and their citizens.⁶³ Mathew Page’s call for digitizing and providing open access to external repositories of knowledge is equally urgent. This issue is

⁶⁰ In October 2011j

⁶¹ The name may recall the EITI (Export Income Transparency Initiative). This is an international compact to make publicly available the income obtained, especially from the exploitation of natural resources. It is similar in motivation to *Publish What You Pay* aimed at firms that transact for such commodities. These agreements have had minimal impact on the capacity and integrity of institutions *within* the producing countries. For an important study of the scale and intricacies of these issues, see Ricardo Soares de Oliveira, *Oil and the Politics in the Gulf of Guinea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). Significant reports are produced by *Enough!* directed by John Prendergast and with the support of actor, George Cooley. They now appear in the publication, *Sentry*. Other organizations that perform vital work in this area are *Global Witness* and the *Natural Resources Governance Institute*.

⁶² A short lived, *Consortium for Development Partnerships* (CDP) in the first decade of this century, funded by the Foreign Ministry of The Netherlands, and a more fully realized *Research Alliance to Combat HIV/AIDS* (REACH), funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, reflected the search for the collaborative architecture Brooks proposed. On the *Africa Collaborative Learning Initiative*, see www.africaCLI.org.

⁶³ A cause that President Emmanuel Macron of France has embraced.

particularly stark concerning knowledge about Africa that has accumulated in external libraries, archives, and other repositories.

After completing my doctorate at Oxford University in 1973, my immediate aim was to secure a teaching position in an African university. Deliberate steps – not always successful – have since been taken to ensure that my published writings are accessible to persons on the continent. Much can be done to accelerate such access to knowledge. Internet access to selected digitized archives, and facilitation of in-person visits to archives pertinent to the study of African governance, can be accelerated.

How do you build and sustain institutions of capacity and integrity is an endeavor around which much learning can be shared. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of such an initiative that does not require plumbing knowledge sources worldwide, and also incentivizing the distillation of knowledge in Africa from its people's lived experiences and their cultural and other institutions.

Projects

I have long envisioned creating a learning and resource center in an African institution. I was told a few years ago by Prof. Ayo Olukotun that he also envisioned such an entity. With the provisional name, *Arima Learning and Resource Center*, this idea can now be vigorously pursued. To it will be donated my personal library and teaching materials. These will be steadily expanded with the addition of similar materials from other scholars.

In association with this initiative, my archival collection will be donated to one or more universities in which I have studied, taught, or both. Arrangements will be made for the selective digitization of these materials and for open access commensurate with available technologies and financial resources.

Post-colonial Redesign

One of Hafsat Abiola's comments embraces a large agenda of analytical work: ***The state system we have adopted, by and large, is poorly suited to our society, and easy to press into service for cabals, internal and external. It will be hard not to be poor performing.***

"The Theory of the State" is the title of a course I first taught at the University of Ibadan, 1976-1979. It is in that course, and interactions with my students and persons outside the campus, that the notion of prebendalism germinated. I follow Prof. Theda Skocpol of Harvard University in thinking of the state as

“a complex of institutions”. Inspired by Ms. Abiola’s assertion, I will return to this “problematic” at the earliest opportunity and prepare a document for collaborative reflection.

I have been asked on many occasions how can politics and governance in Nigeria move beyond prebendalism? The answer is short: If I knew, I would share it immediately. Particularly pertinent is Crawford Young’s notion of a “charter of resurrection” and his statement that its formulation would not be the work of any single scholar. Indeed, *Exiting the Dismal Tunnel* is not just a collaborative intellectual project. It is an experiential and experimental one.

I recall a poignant plea from Mr. Nuhu Ribadu, the pioneering former director of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), at a meeting of Nigerians in Washington, DC. “Don’t you want Nigeria to become a *normal* country”? As with the comments earlier from Dr. Ezekwesili, informing Nigerian lawyers and jurists about the extraordinary level of theft of national income, Mr. Ribadu’s audience did not need an explanation of what he meant by “a normal country”.

Returning to Ms. Abiola’s, “*We should start with the design*”, I do not interpret “redesign” as the familiar “restructuring”. Such proposals in Nigeria usually fizzle out or are snuffed out. I interpret it as “the redesign of institutions to enhance capacity and integrity”. Such an effort should be a national movement, incentivizing individuals in multiple contexts. Everyone, as Prof. Prasad’s wrote, becomes involved in corruption to some extent. The redesign process is one that would engage Nigerians horizontally, vertically, and transnationally. The leadership of such an effort cannot parallel grandiose initiatives that Nigerian governments occasionally launch, and which become partisan political ventures and sources of patronage.⁶⁴ There are non-governmental entities in many sectors of the country that can provide the energy, funding, and ideas for such an effort.⁶⁵ As was said above, there are precedents for such collaborative actions, whether to resist dictatorship or combat the Ebola epidemic. And they can be found more routinized in cultural, faith-based, and some business entities.

Other Projects

⁶⁴ An infamous example is MAMSER (Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery) established in 1987 with an impossibly broad mandate.

⁶⁵ There are many such organizations that come to mind, such as NexTier, led by Dr. Patrick Okigbo, and the Centre for Values and Leadership (CVL) led by Prof. Pat Utomi.

- A multi-media archival initiative (including oral history) on the defeat of tyranny, and the defense of constitutional democracy in Nigeria, 1993-1998 – otherwise known as the June 12 Movement.
- The preparation of a distilled and augmented version of *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* in an affordable edition.⁶⁶
- The writing of a book on *The Nigerian Crucible* distilled from many essays, talks, and other documents. A score of these have been already posted, under this rubric, on Arch Library, the Open Access repository of Northwestern University.
- The devising of metrics on institutional capacity and integrity and the mapping of Nigeria – by states and local government areas – so their achievements and deficiencies can be readily perceived.
- The distillation of methods of accountability and popular empowerment, designed and implemented at local levels in India and other countries, and their adaptation to Nigeria.
- The extraction of practices from known loci of capacity and integrity – in traditional, religious, cultural/artistic, and commercial institutions – and their application to wider social and economic sectors.
- The distillation, from the records of foundations and other funding organizations, of past projects - whose objectives coincide with the E.I C.I. mission - of what has been learned from those experiences.
- The teaching of institutional capacity and integrity throughout the educational system, from primary school and beyond. Such an endeavor can be matched by other organizations which design their own training methods and can share what has been tried and proven effective.
- Essay writing, school debates, and prize award ceremonies for leadership, in honor of Nigerian stalwarts in capacity and integrity, such Justice Akinola Aguda, Dr. Obi Ezekweseli, and Mr. Beko Ransome Kuti.
- The tapping of unique bodies of knowledge that have been acquired over decades by satellites, and can be used innovatively to study what has been taking place on earth. Many areas of adverse impact – climate change, grazing and agriculture, forestry, over-fishing, environmental waste, clean water, migration, transportation – can benefit from the “Overview Effect”.⁶⁷
- Reflections on how the wealth stashed abroad by Nigerians can be enticed back home to invest in building institutional capacity and integrity.
- Festivals are vital dimensions of Nigerian life and culture. There can be festivals devoted to celebrating capacity and integrity. Existing cultural events can be adapted to meet this objective.

The Case for Mixed Government

An idea once advanced by Richard Sklar deserves consideration. Prof. Sklar was not an advocate for full-fledged transitions to constitutional multiparty democracy in Africa. He had studied and observed at first-hand the tumult of the post-independence governments. While he welcomed the political and economic liberalization after 1989, he felt it was patterned too much on external models. Already mentioned above are his views on “dual majesty”, that is, legitimate authority residing in customary and traditional systems as well as secular institutions that derive from western – and colonial – powers.

⁶⁶ This recommendation was initially made by Dr. Abimbola Agboluaje. The same can be said for other books mentioned above by W. Adebani, O. B. Jeyifo, and others.

⁶⁷ A former student colleague, Dr. Frank White, is a pioneer in this field.

By questioning the suitability of current state systems to African societies, Ms. Abiola is raising a perennial issue. The hurdles to be overcome have been wrestled over. They include the fact that not all practices in customary institutions are salutary, and that most African countries are multi-ethnic with a cornucopia of different practices, rituals, and norms. I addressed this issue briefly in one of the appendices of *Democracy and Prebendal Politics* when I mentioned the parallels, notably among Yoruba chieftaincy systems, of what seemed like precursor of prebendalism. But such reflections were tentative.

The views of Bergman, Ekeh, and Sklar, when combined with contemporary research on African chieftaincy systems, can suggest important trajectories. How can values, norms, and practices from this large repertoire be infused into the world of secular politics. Prof. Utomi has called attention to the migration of high-level professionals – jurists, civil servants, and academics – to assume leadership positions in traditional institutions. Such career shifts have occurred incrementally over many years. If these institutions now exert a stronger pull, as Prof Utomi suggests, such trends can be explored for the redesign of secular institutions.

The Case for National Government

There are moments when democratic governments decide to take a pause from intense partisanship because of existential threats to the nation. A national government was constituted in Britain to meet the extraordinary challenges posed by the Axis Powers during World War II. After the war, party politics fully resumed. Nigeria has also experienced such national governments, notably after 1967 when the Federation was mobilized to confront the secessionist entity, Biafra. Has the time arrived to envisage a time-limited national government in Nigeria for which the best talents in the country, and overseas, can be recruited?

There are two and a half years remaining in the second and final term of President Muhammadu Buhari. The governor of Kaduna state in the northwest, Nasir Ahmad El-Rufai, who is perennially considered a candidate for the federal presidency, recently suggested that there should be a “power shift” (i.e. the presidency) in 2023 to the south. Such formulas seem inappropriate when the country is confronted by so many woes.

Would the Nigerian political class contemplate a “cooling off” period to allow a federal executive, comprised of persons of proven capacity and integrity, to shift the country onto the rails of competence and productivity? Such a government can be designed to respect constitutional provisions regarding

“federal character” in the making of appointments. What can be done about the rather abysmal performance of the federal legislature is an issue that others can consider.

There are other countries which, faced with stalled systems, have established non-partisan governments to devise and implement far-reaching reforms. This has recently been the case in Sudan since the ouster of the longtime autocrat, Omar al-Bashir. The model chosen in Sudan is a diarchy, with the military retaining a considerable share of power. This system is the outcome of a negotiating process following months of sustained popular protests. The leading organs of the current government consist of representatives of civil society and the professions. There is a commitment to an eventual transition to constitutional civilian rule.

Nigeria can experiment with national government without interrupting many of the basic institutions of the Fourth Republic. Such a national government would not emulate the sovereign national conferences that, mainly in francophone Africa, dislodged military and one-party regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. There are many Nigerians, at home and abroad, who would have much to contribute to this conversation.

Nigerian governance is at an impasse. Developmental governance and inclusive growth are unlikely to be achieved by going through more cycles of electoral chicanery. Another round of military intervention, as occurred recently in Mali, would merely return Nigeria to a tunnel from which it was extracted at great cost. On the other hand, continuing with “roguery and money-sharing” as the key mode of politics and government will mean that Nigeria will continue to rank high on global indices of conflict, corruption, poverty, and hunger.

A time-limited change of government executives could be paralleled by appropriate adjustments at state and local levels. Nigeria has held together since the Civil War ended in 1970. From “Unity in Diversity” it has drifted to “Disunity and Disrepair”. When Nigerians celebrate the many achievements of their fellow citizens overseas, they wonder how people from the same nation can perform admirably abroad and deplorably at home. In asking this question, and cooperating in the search for answers, ideas for sustainable transformation can emerge.

The purpose of this exercise has been to contribute to this quest from my personal experiences, readings, and writings. I do not presume to have answers to the perplexing questions raised. As mentioned above, I was invited to participate in the design phase of the Second Republic in 1977. On the eve of Nigeria’s 60th anniversary, I will begin preparing a large quantity of books and teaching

materials to be made available to Nigerians, and to build and make accessible a vast archival collection. “Networks of soloists” – and clusters thereof - can be constituted, using the “brilliant technology at our command...to collaborate around a clear question”. That question, as Prof. Roger Myerson crisply stated, is “How to improve governance in Africa”.

Conclusion

One of my former students at the University of Ibadan, Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, has gone on to have a distinguished career as an academic researcher, teacher, and university leader. In response to an online conversation, he wrote the following about me just as this paper was coming to a close:

*Professor Richard Joseph is ...one of the shapers of an intellectual movement that defined Nigerian and African scholarship for a long time. His influence can never grow less because our conditions have become worse. I think all the time of the abysmal tunnel that he referred to ... and wonder **when and how we can begin to get out of it**. I personally believe we have not sufficiently interrogated the enduring abysmal foundations of colonialism, and that there are gaps to fill in that regard. We celebrate him and his challenge to us to continually reflect on the deeper roots of our extant conditions.*

I thank Prof. Osaghae for his generous remarks. I quote them here because he, as Hafsat Abiola, has spoken frankly of the challenges to be tackled. They both know the Nigerian reality intimately. I agree that we have to interrogate anew the colonial impact. Indeed, I began doing so regarding Cameroon and French colonialism but temporarily put aside that exercise to write this paper. Those reflections will resume. I am also inspired by his remarks to address how my approach to Nigerian and African politics has evolved.

As a leading scholar of Nigerian and comparative politics, Prof. Osaghae recognizes the crucial role to be played by the Academy in exploring the “deeper roots” of the *abysmal (dismal) tunnel*. The ultimate purpose of such an endeavor is, as argued in this paper, to determine “when and how we can begin to get out of it”. It was such a question that launched me into rethinking the fundamentals of politics and society in Nigeria - at a time of optimism in 1978-79 as oil revenues flowed and the return to constitutional government neared. I intended writing at that time a book on the making of the Second Republic. Instead, two books were combined into one: the contours of renewed party politics and the unstable ground on which that system rested.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ I considered writing two separate books but was dissuaded from doing so by my Dartmouth College colleague, Professor Nelson Kasfir.

In brief, I did not see the Second Republic - that would begin on October 1, 1979 - as functioning securely in light of the socio-political practices I called “prebendalism”. It is widely understood what has taken Nigeria and other African countries deeper into the Dismal Tunnel of predation and misgovernance. Reversing this corrosive process, however, has remained elusive.

Two years before he was elected president of the United States, a brilliant politician and orator called this challenge, “The Fight of Our Time”. He has chosen, however, not to lead the Fight, whether during two terms as president or the first four years of his post-presidency. Apart from a variety of human rights and other international organizations mentioned earlier, what I said regarding John Campbell’s forthcoming book is tacitly taken as a feature of our era: “postcolonial entities in which elite predation and popular insecurity are interwoven”. This endpoint can serve as a new starting point for exploring the redesign of the complex entity known as Nigeria.

*It may be when we no longer know what to do,
We have come to our real work,
And when we no longer know which way to go,
We have begun our real journey.*









Photographs from top:

- Former colleagues in the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan
- Olisa Agbakoba, Head, Civil Liberties Organisation
- Emeka Izeze, Managing Director, *The Guardian* (Lagos)
- Professors Adigun Agbaje, Eghosa Osaghae, Oye Oyediran, and Dr. Alexandra Gillies
- Odia Ofeimun and Profs. Michere Mugo, Abiola Irele, and Biodun Jeyifo
- Inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo and Nigeria's Fourth Republic, May 30, 1999