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Child soldier, warlord, victim, perpetrator

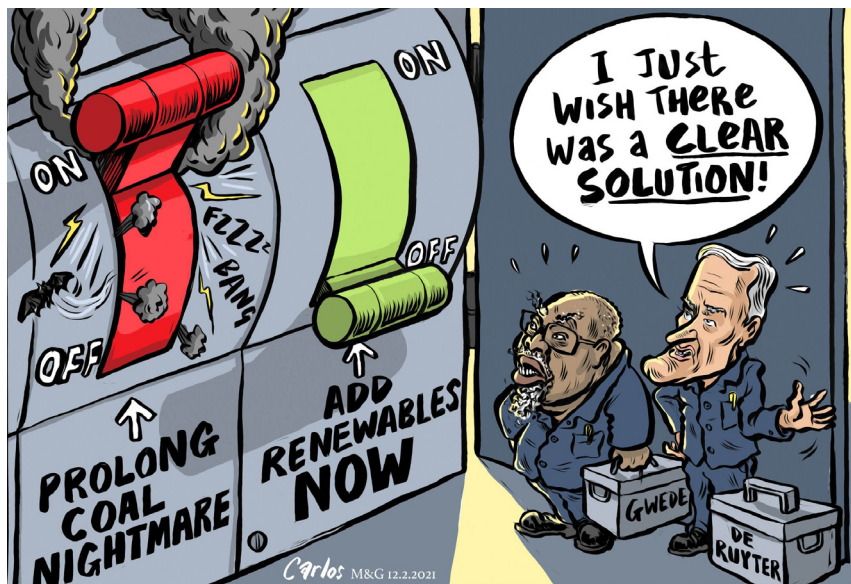
The difficulty of doing justice to Dominic Ongwen

Inside:



COVER: The child soldier who became a warlord. What does justice look like for Dominic Ongwen? (p24)

- **Vaccines:** South Africa had to rethink its vaccine strategy, fast (p9)
- **Into the lion's den:** Tundu Lissu and Pastor Evan Mawarire on returning from exile (p15)
- **Welcome to Juba!** Let the Junubeen show you around (p17)
- **Review:** *Judas and the Black Messiah* (p20)
- **Watch this cyberspace:** Nigeria's adventures in bitcoin (p33)



In the dark: With yet another round of power cuts to endure, South Africans are wondering why minister Gwede Mantashe and state-owned power company boss André de Ruyter have failed to give the green light to renewable energy initiatives.

The Week in Numbers

40%

The predicted loss in government revenues for Angola, Equatorial Guinea and South Sudan by 2040, as the world moves away from fossil fuels. This is according to a new report by Carbon Tracker, a think tank. For Algeria, Chad, Congo, Gabon, Libya and Nigeria the predicted losses are in the 20%-40% range.

25,000 naira

The amount, equivalent to \$65, that it cost to obtain a counterfeit Covid-19 test result at a fake testing facility near the airport in Abuja. Travellers did not necessarily know that the tests were fake. The scam has now been shut down, and Nigerian authorities are implementing a centralised database to verify results.

88,100 km

The length of Zimbabwe's official road network, of which 17,400 kilometres is paved. These roads are in such poor condition that this week the Cabinet resolved that the entire network be declared a "state of disaster". This declaration should release resources for roads to be repaired and rehabilitated.



1,000 South Sudanese Pounds

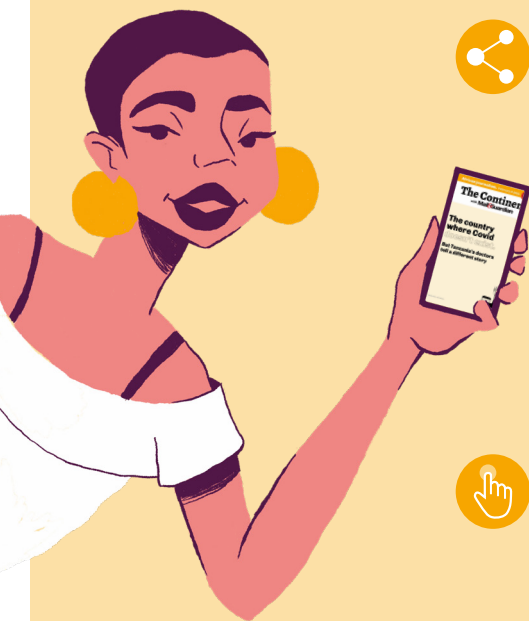
The value of a new banknote introduced in South Sudan this week, officially equivalent to a little less than \$7. The Central Bank says the new note is in response to "demand for higher denomination banknotes", but it may also have something to do with the currency's swift depreciation against the dollar.

2

The number of new cases of Ebola deaths recorded in the Democratic Republic of Congo this month. It is unclear whether the two victims came into contact with one another. Health authorities are not too worried about widespread transmission because most people in the area have already been vaccinated against the deadly disease.

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Namibia

Indigenous groups oppose lucrative oil deal

A Canadian company wants to drill for oil in the Kavango Basin, despite environmental concerns

Sheree Bega

A Canadian company's move to scour the Kavango Basin in the Kalahari desert for oil and gas has attracted opposition from indigenous groups who say the project threatens the ecosystem on which they depend.

The company, Recon Africa, has received the green light from the governments of Namibia and Botswana to begin the exploration for oil and gas in the 35,000 square kilometres in the watershed of the Okavango Delta, a Unesco-designated World Heritage Site. ReconAfrica and the Namibian government, which holds a 10% stake in the project, say the development of a successful oil and gas industry



Under threat: The Okavango Delta is a Unesco-designated World Heritage Site. (Photo: Gertrude M. Matswiri)

will increase state income, provide jobs, energy independence, and the drilling of community water wells and infrastructure.

But the San first people of southern Africa oppose the project and have petitioned both governments. Opponents say the hunt for oil and gas threatens vital waterways in the arid savannas of Namibia and the Okavango Delta, home to the largest remaining elephant population, huge wildlife populations and a key water source for over a million people.

“Drilling for oil and gas will bring devastation to these communities,” Q7 Beckett, a San youth leader, told *The Continent*. He led a 1500km walk from Knysa to the Namibian consulate in Cape Town on February 1 in protest against the project. ■

Liberia



Can't touch this

The president's son has repeatedly used his diplomatic passport to avoid arrest in France

It was 3.20am on the morning of February 2 when Parisian police knocked on the door of an apartment in the exclusive Alma-Marceau district. Inside were eight people, all of whom appeared to be having a great time.

The raucous, alcohol-fuelled party was in clear violation of France's strict Covid-19 restrictions, which restrict gatherings and require residents to adhere to a 6pm-6am curfew.

Among the revellers was 33-year-old George Weah Junior, professional

Naughty step: Weah Junior's antics earned him a reprimand from his father

football player and son of Liberian president George Weah. Weah was “très alcoolisé”, a police source told *Le Parisien* – very drunk – and was flashing his diplomatic passport, claiming immunity from prosecution.

Subsequently, Weah's neighbours told French media that he has hosted several illegal parties at his own apartment in another Parisian suburb, complete with champagne, a jacuzzi, loud music and laughing gas. Nor is it the first time he has used his diplomatic passport to get himself out of trouble.

“My father is very angry,” Weah Junior told *Le Parisien* in an apologetic interview. “My family is very unhappy with this situation because it tarnishes a reputation that has always been very good.”

The affair has caused a scandal at home. “It is indeed sad and disgraceful that someone entrusted with our diplomatic passport, by virtue of his dad representing the 4.5-million people of Liberia as their president, would choose to discredit such international honour through actions and behaviors that contravene diplomatic norms,” said the Monrovia-based *New Dawn* in an editorial. ■

Ethiopia

Civilian casualties confirmed

A new Human Rights Watch report alleges that Ethiopian forces indiscriminately bombed three towns in Tigray

The information blackout imposed by the Ethiopian government during its civil war against the Tigray region has made it difficult if not impossible to verify widespread reports of civilian casualties.

But a new Human Rights Watch report, based on extensive witness testimony corroborated with photos, video and satellite imagery, has concluded that the Ethiopian military carried out apparently unlawful shelling of civilian areas in the cities of Mekelle, Humera and Shire in November 2020.

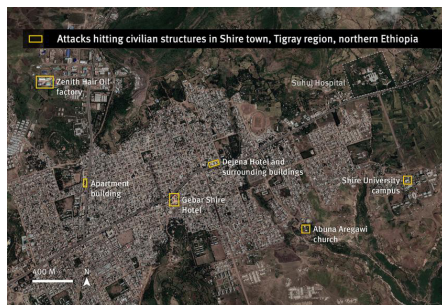
At least 83 civilians were killed in these incidents, including children, and over 300 were wounded.

“At the war’s start, Ethiopian federal forces fired artillery into Tigray’s urban areas in an apparently indiscriminate manner that was bound to cause civilian casualties and property damage,” said

Laetitia Bader, Horn of Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “These attacks have shattered civilian lives in Tigray and displaced thousands of people, underscoring the urgency for ending unlawful attacks and holding those responsible to account.”

The Ethiopian government has not responded directly to the report, but has previously said that its offensive against Tigray “avoided combat in cities and towns” and provided “the maximum protection to civilians”. It denied using explosives in urban areas, and said that hospitals, schools and residential areas were not targeted.

The conflict – dubbed a “law enforcement operation” by the government – began in November and has displaced more than 200,000 people and forced tens of thousands to seek refuge in neighbouring Sudan. ■



Under attack: Human Rights Watch's map of artillery strikes in Shire

Tanzania

'Acute pneumonia'

Five generals die from Covid-like symptoms as concern grows

Dar es Salaam correspondent

Five brigadier-generals have reportedly died in Tanzania in the past two weeks after developing Covid-like symptoms including shortness of breath, high fever and the loss of sense and smell.

This is despite President John Magufuli's official insistence that Covid-19 was eliminated from Tanzania after three days of national prayer in May 2020.

Doctors are forbidden to list Covid-19 as a cause of death, encouraged instead to write "acute pneumonia" on death certificates. But doctors working in major hospitals in Dar es Salaam told *The Continent* that patients are dying from the coronavirus at an alarming rate – despite what the government might say.

On Thursday, in a major challenge to the government's position, parliamentarian Zacharia Isaay raised the issue of "pneumonia" on the floor of the National Assembly.

"Let the government avoid stammering

about this while people are vanishing in my constituency. I'm tired of funerals and even today, they are burying a child of a ward councillor. Sometimes I go there without notifying you Mr Speaker," said Issay, according to *The Citizen* newspaper.

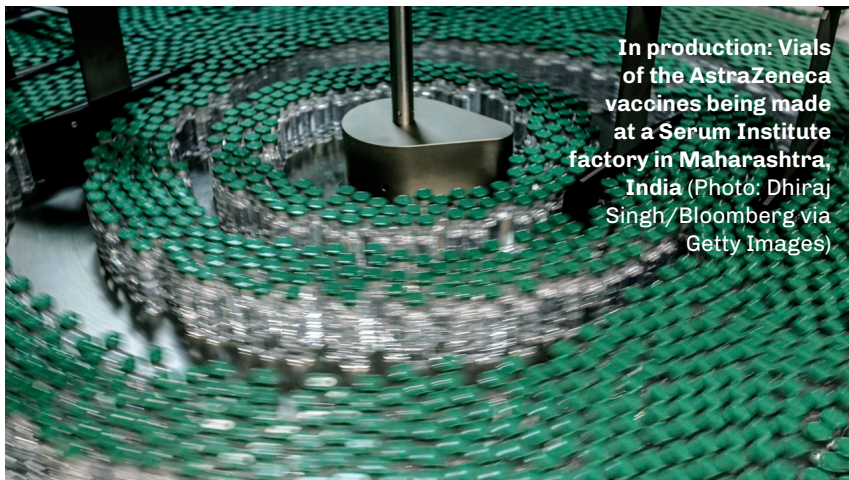
Isaay belongs to the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party and represents the Mbulu Urban constituency.

"Just yesterday I went to Benjamin Mkapa Hospital [in the capital Dodoma] for testing and I was told that all gas cylinders were in use ... a lot of people are sick. Now, I decided to speak about this openly. If there are people who will take offence, it's up to them but I have spoken about this."

This is despite President John Magufuli's official insistence that Covid-19 was eliminated from Tanzania after three days of national prayer in 2020

The United States Embassy in Dar es Salaam also risked the ire of Magufuli's government this week, issuing a statement on Wednesday warning that the virus was spreading fast in the country. "The US Embassy is aware of a significant increase in the number of Covid-19 cases since January 2021," it said. ■

South Africa



In production: Vials of the AstraZeneca vaccines being made at a Serum Institute factory in Maharashtra, India (Photo: Dhiraj Singh/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

South Africa forced to rethink its vaccine strategy

The tale of SA's Covid-19 vaccine rollout is emblematic of this pandemic, writes **Laura López González**. When what we know about a new disease changes daily and deaths continue to mount, policymakers must rely on imperfect information to make some very tough calls.

South Africa has secured nine-million doses of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) Covid-19 vaccine and expects 80 000 doses to land in the country as soon as next week, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced late Thursday during the State of the Nation Address. The news comes

as the government makes last-minute changes to its vaccine rollout plan after disappointing results from its previous front-runner jab, the AstraZeneca vaccine, were announced earlier this week

One-million AstraZeneca doses had already arrived in South Africa when

researchers revealed the two-dose vaccine had failed to protect against mild-to-moderate Covid-19 disease caused by the 501.V2 variant of the virus now dominating infections in the country.

But results from a South African study could not say how or if the AstraZeneca vaccine protected against severe Covid-19 disease caused by the new variant, or related hospitalisations or deaths.

This single lingering question has come to define discussions around the vaccine in South Africa and abroad.

Before the advent of the new variant, the AstraZeneca vaccine reduced the risk of mild to moderate disease by 75% in South Africans who had been given the jab as part of a roughly 2,000-person study.

J&J jabs will be distributed as part of an expanded clinical trial

In the wake of the disappointing results, the South African government paused its planned rollout of the AstraZeneca vaccine. Instead, the country will now begin offering the J&J vaccine to healthcare workers as part of the initial phase of the country's rollout.

The J&J vaccine – also tested in South Africa – has been found to be about 60% effective in preventing mild to serious Covid-19 disease caused by the 501.V2 variant in the country. Not a single person who got the vaccine in the eight-country study was hospitalised or died of Covid-19, regardless of prevalent variants.

The study remains the world's largest Covid-19 vaccine trial to date.

South African researchers working on

the trial were likely pivotal in negotiating access to massive amounts of J&J vaccines.

These immunisations will be given to healthcare workers as an expanded clinical trial, meaning that vaccines will be distributed to workers at dozens of clinical research sites around the country, Medical Research Council President Glenda Gray confirmed early this week.

J&J has committed to selling vaccines at no-profit prices

The J&J vaccine has already been shown to be safe and effective against the variant.

Still, the decision to provide the vaccine via an expanded clinical trial is likely a move meant to balance healthcare workers' dire need for immediate access to the jab with the desire by regulators to collect more data on the vaccine in South Africa.

The co-chair of the J&J vaccine trial, Linda-Gail Bekker, who is also the chief operating officer of the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation, explained earlier this month that J&J planned to honour its pledge to seek no profit from the vaccine in South Africa. Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said the country might also secure some jabs for free based on their use in the expanded trial.

The AstraZeneca vaccine's fate in South Africa remains uncertain

In his state of the nation, Ramaphosa did not discuss what would happen to the one-million AstraZeneca doses in the country or the further 500,000 that had also been pre-ordered.

Although Mkhize has said South

Africa could sell doses or swap them from another type of vaccine, nothing has been confirmed.

But on Wednesday, World Health Organisation (WHO) officials in Geneva said they understood South Africa still planned to use the AstraZeneca vaccine – albeit carefully, and in a way that would allow it to collect more data on the jab.

On Wednesday, WHO officials said they understood South Africa still planned to use AstraZeneca, albeit carefully, and in a way that would allow for the collection of more data

“The intention, as we understand it from South Africa, is to proceed with the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine in the context of collecting — in a very dedicated and well-designed way — the kind of information needed to fill in some of the gaps in information,” said Katherine O’Brien, the head of the WHO’s department of immunisation, vaccines and biologicals. “We will be doing everything possible to support South Africa in any way we can around the design of evaluations of the vaccine.”

The South African health department did not respond to requests by *The Continent* to confirm this information.

O’Brien was part of the WHO expert panel that on Wednesday recommended AstraZeneca for use in countries,

including South Africa, where new variants of Covid-19 might be present.

Why? In part because the AstraZeneca vaccine was able to show promising ability to activate parts of the immune system against the virus even when tested against the variant in South Africa.

Vaccines that have been shown to be effective against the variant have shown similar patterns, the WHO explained, making it plausible that AstraZeneca could do the same.

And with thousands dying each day, this information — as imperfect as it is — compelled the WHO to recommend AstraZeneca for continued use in countries with variants.

“Waiting for more information, when we have enough to make a recommendation, I think, would not be appropriate,” said Alejandro Cravioto, who chairs the WHO expert committee on vaccines. “We have thousands of people dying from infection. Anything we can do to use a product that might reduce that is totally justified — even if the information is not as complete as we would like.”

In South Africa, with no clear conclusion drawn from the data around AstraZeneca, debates among officials and scientists about what to do next are likely ongoing and expected to be robust.

However, the real question may be whether the South African public will choose to take a vaccine such as AstraZeneca that could plausibly protect them against severe Covid-19, when they are also presented with a vaccine such as J&J’s, which has more concrete data. ■

A private citizen steps in

With hospitals unable to afford oxygen and PPE, Malawians are raising money themselves for the country's Covid response

Golden Matonga

Last year, the pandemic took a backseat to politics. Malawi was in crisis after the disputed election of 2019, with protesters taking to the streets each week to demand a new vote. A desire for change gripped the nation; nothing else mattered.

With tens of thousands of people gathering at political rallies and demonstrations across the country, health experts worried that Malawi – with its chronically under-resourced and understaffed hospitals – was wholly unprepared for Covid-19.

The government itself was concerned. Leaked minutes from the state's Drugs and Medical Working Group from March 2020 show the situation was already so grave that a declaration of a national emergency was being considered.

But the pandemic became politicised in unexpected ways. The opposition did not want to delay the elections, so they played down the pandemic in a manner that now – after attaining power – is coming back to haunt them. The government of former president Peter Mutharika tried and failed to use Covid-19 as an excuse to halt the vote. Even its attempt at a lockdown



To the rescue: Stanley Onjezani Kenani's fundraiser has provided oxygen and PPEs to hospitals that desperately need it

was thrown out by the courts, who were concerned that no provisions were in place to lessen the socioeconomic impact.

Elections went ahead, and the opposition won comfortably. It is now President Lazarus Chakwera's job to contain the pandemic. He's not playing down the threat anymore. Last month, he declared a state of national disaster and announced restrictive measures: closing schools and banning large gatherings, and instituting an overnight curfew.

By Wednesday, the country of 18.6-million people had recorded 27,772

cases of Covid-19, with 883 deaths. The virus has struck down two cabinet ministers; five members of parliament; renowned academics; arguably the country's finest musical talent, Wambali Mkandawire; mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers; and children. Hospitals are overwhelmed and are struggling to access oxygen cylinders and the pressure regulators necessary to administer them.

Taking initiative

Enter Stanley Onjezani Kenani, the poet and writer who has been short-listed twice for the Caine Prize. He told *The Continent*: "I was deeply shocked when Paul Msoma, a friend, wrote on Facebook that at Kamuzu Central Hospital, where he was hospitalised, they had oxygen but no pressure regulators. Each regulator cost 223,000 kwacha (\$288). Friends ran around to buy the pressure regulator for Paul. Unfortunately, we still lost him."

For want of a pressure regulator, his friend had died. "This made me think of doing something. How many people out there were in Paul Msoma's situation but had no one to turn to?" said Kenani, who is based in France.

He moved to set up the Covid Response Private Citizens Initiative to raise funds to purchase the supplies necessary to combat Covid, including oxygen, regulators and personal protective equipment. As of last week, the fund had raised \$170,000, and more money keeps pouring in.

The donations have come from grieving families, cabinet ministers, doctors, nurses, students, teachers, banks, university and high school alumni,

Malawians in the diaspora, and even from rural villages where Covid is sometimes dismissed as a hoax.

It is the gifts of the people who do not have much to give that have touched Kenani most. "A woman nursing her sick husband in Blantyre sent us 5,000 kwacha (\$6.50). A woman who had just lost her brother sent us 75,000 kwacha (\$97)."

The initiative has raised so much money it has had to hire auditors, and made Kenani a household name. President Chakwera has praised him, and he is even being talked about as a future presidential candidate, though Kenani has been quick to defuse such speculation.

While lauding the contribution of Kenani and his supporters, analysts have pointed out that it should not be the job of private citizens to raise money for basic medical supplies; and that the public embrace of the initiative is an indictment on the government's ability to manage its own money properly.

"We have a situation that requires urgent action but the procurement system is marred with various abuses," said Boniface Dulani, lead researcher for the Institute for Public Opinion and Research.

As if to underline Dulani's point, this week the director of public prosecutions ordered police to investigate public officials from both the previous and current administrations who are alleged to have abused Covid-19 funds.

Meanwhile, the Covid case count keeps rising – as do the donations into the Covid Response Private Citizens fund. ■

Stanley Onjezani Kenani's poem, Echoes, is printed overleaf, with the poet's permission.

Echoes

By Stanley Onjezani Kenani

*The sun has vanished again
Our skies are overcast. Above us
Fly carrion birds, their sounds
Bounce off our mountains
Caw, caw, caw, caw,
Echoing.*

*The sea parted once, and we
Started crossing it barefoot
But now angry waters
Are closing in again
Above us, the sound of birds
Caw, caw, caw, caw,
Echoing.*

*Every day the air is filled with nothing
But the heady scent of stargazer lilies
The children ask: where is mother?
Only the sound of birds answers them
Caw, caw, caw, caw,
Echoing.*

*When will the clouds clear again?
When shall we again hear
The happy chatter of house sparrows?
We don't know, no one does.
For now day and night
The same sound fills the air:
Caw, caw, caw, caw,
Echoing.*

Malawian poet Stanley Onjezani Kenani is the founder of the Covid Response Private Citizens initiative. He wrote this in response to the pandemic.

Alexei Navalny and the dangers of going home

Despite the threat of certain arrest, the Russian opposition leader made the difficult decision to fly back to Moscow. Opposition leaders in Africa are all too familiar with his dilemma.

Aanu Adeoye

Alexei Navalny was not supposed to be in a Moscow jail. If it were up to the FSB, Russia's main intelligence agency, the 44-year-old opposition leader would be six feet under, dead in August after being poisoned with Novichok, the Soviet-era nerve agent that has been weaponised by the agency in recent years to target the Kremlin's enemies.

But Navalny is alive, now serving a sentence of about two and a half years for violating parole on a 2014 conviction. Navalny and his brother, Oleg, were found guilty of embezzling \$500,000 from a French cosmetics company. Oleg served three and a half years in a prison colony while Navalny received a suspended sentence. In 2018, the European Court of Human Rights called the conviction "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable".

The prosecutors in Navalny's case argue he violated the terms of his parole by failing to show up with the relevant authorities or doing so on the wrong day of the week. What they failed to say



In exile: Putin critic Alexei Navalny and his family in Germany before his return to Russia, where he was promptly jailed

was that Navalny was recuperating in Germany after the assassination attempt during the bulk of the period under review. Navalny, who has repeatedly embarrassed President Vladimir Putin with investigative reports on corruption published on YouTube, was arrested upon arrival on January 17 after spending nearly five months in a Berlin hospital.

It was never in doubt that Navalny would be arrested upon his return to

Russia; the surprise is that he decided to return home anyway. Since Navalny's detention, nationwide protests in his defence have swept Russia.

Navalny was arrested in January after spending nearly five months in a Berlin hospital recovering from poisoning

Tundu Lissu also has experience returning home after an assassination attempt. The Tanzanian politician, an opposition MP at the time, was shot 16 times in 2017 at his residence in Dodoma. He was flown to Kenya and Belgium for treatment. After his recovery, Lissu spent three years living in Belgium with his wife before returning in 2020 to run against President John Magufuli as candidate for the opposition party, Chadema.

Why would he return in 2020 knowing that nothing had changed? Lissu told *The Continent* his return was a "gamble" based on "hope that the worst had passed".

"I chose to return primarily because it was a general election year and I believed Magufuli needed to be confronted and defeated on the ballot box," he said.

The return did not work out as planned. The election was marred by violence and irregularities, and Lissu fled back to Belgium following alleged threats to his life. He acknowledges his absence from Tanzania makes it difficult to continue his political mission, a fate analysts say Navalny was keen to avoid and was key to his decision to return

home. "Not being able to participate in the struggle in Tanzania is obviously a major drawback but as long as I'm alive, the struggle continues," Lissu said, noting that social media has proven to be a useful tool in communicating with Tanzanians.

He foresees a return to the country at an indeterminate time.

An unacknowledged aspect of the life of an opposition politician is the strain it exerts on their personal relationships. Navalny's wife, Yulia, recently left for Germany and their two children are also believed to be abroad.

Evan Mawarire, a pastor and leader of #ThisFlag, a pro-democracy movement in Zimbabwe, returned home in 2017 after six months in the US. He had been arrested multiple times by the government of then-President Robert Mugabe. Mawarire, who, like Navalny, was arrested at the airport, told *The Continent* his family was constantly worried about him.

"The impact on your family is the hardest to deal with. I saw the anguish in my wife as she processed my decision. Besides the fact that my family faced full-on danger too, they also had to deal with the daily concern of my safety when I landed in prison or when I'd been tortured."

The decision to return home while also maintaining personal safety is fraught with challenges, says Mawarire, describing it as "trying to join the repelling sides of two magnets."

"Staying completely safe whilst confronting a brutal dictatorship is impossible." ■

Welcome to Juba

Juba, the city of golden opportunities. Most outsiders think of it as a war zone, but South Sudan's capital is so much more than that, writes **David Mono Danga**



Vibe check

Although some of the negative stuff that we read, listen to and watch in the media is true, there's also a whole lot of good untold stuff about Juba.

Juba is one of the coolest places one can be in as a visitor to the world's newest country. It doesn't matter whether you wish to work here or are just a short-term visitor, Juba will treat you well.

The city has some of the world's tallest people. That's right. Some

Junubeen (South Sudanese people) are unnecessarily tall. They are also the most generous and humble people in the region, although some can be notoriously short-tempered when provoked.

It's a place where you can't get lost. Not because it has Google Maps but rather for lack of reliable internet connections to use the app effectively. Fortunately, Junubeen will always show you directions and tell you shukran (thanks) for asking.

Getting around

It's easy to get around the city too. I don't have a car, so Boda Boda motorcycles are a convenience in and around the city.

When rushing, Boda Bodas are perfect to beat the unnecessary traffic that's sometimes caused by poor driving, sometimes by the traffic officers themselves.

But when not busy, Muasalat, public transportation, is convenient and relatively cheaper.

Public taxis are also great – especially when I am broke. Particularly because sometimes fellow passengers just volunteer to pay your transport fare, for no reason.

It could be someone you know, or met once before, or it could just be a stranger who woke up on the right side of their bed and wishes to show off his financial stamina.

Yes, these are Junubeen.

Sightseeing and places to eat

It's a noisy city but there are also quiet calm places where one can have some moments of solitude. Tuscana Hotel **(1)** is my favorite hangout place. Located at the bank of the Nile, Tuscana gets a lovely breeze and fresh air from the river. And the view perfectly calms one's mood. It's one of my favorite stops on weekends.

My favorite dish: whole grilled fish served with all sorts of vegetables and a glass of lemon or pineapple juice. This can go for as low as 2,000 South Sudanese pounds (\$14). The grilled chicken breasts and pizza are about the same price.

The quiet Jebel Lodge **(2)** is located at the foot of Jebel Kujur **(3)** (loosely translated as the mountain of witchcraft or wizards or something close to that).

The name sounds scary but hiking the mountain is the sightseeing activity I enjoy most in Juba. Jebel



Lodge restaurant, the only one in the area, is usually quiet and less busy, compared with other hangout spots in Juba. This is probably why most of its clients are foreigners.

I love the fresh smell of plants and flowers on the compound. The stones, sunflowers, aloe vera plants and the forsythia are used to demarcate walking paths, and the swimming pool and the residence compound are scenic and attractive.

The grass thatched tukuls remind me of my hometown Yei and why it's called "Small London". Under them, I don't feel the heat of Juba or hear the noise of any nearby carousers.

After hiking the Jebel Kukur mountain, I come down here to cool my spirits and body in the pool and have a glass or two of wine to quench my thirst.

Since they also serve good pork dishes, I would order roasted pork served with cassava, carrot and lentil soup or garlic mashed cauliflower, which costs up to 5,000 SSP including soft drinks and water.

Another cool spot to relax, refresh and re-energise is Café Nomads where you can sip some Dawa Tea, beneath the UAP Equatoria Tower located in the heart of Juba which is one of the city's tallest buildings; or have a delicious cappuccino at Notos nearby.

Climbing or hiking Jebel Kujur is my second favorite sport after football. Being on top of the mountain and seeing the shrubs and juniper plants glow is an exciting sight on top of the view of Juba City from above.

Unlike in the wet raining season, during the dry season when the bush is burnt and it's all clear, one can see wild rabbits, bush rats and squirrels coming out of their burrows to feel the morning glow and enjoy the syrup fresh smell of the vegetation, although there is often overcrowding of hikers on weekend mornings. Hiking is the new darling of both the youth and elderly, thanks to the pandemic, and it's free.

Favourite time of the year

Personally I enjoy the buildup to Independence Day on July 9, which always comes with celebrations and jubilations that include a showcase of different cultural and traditional dances, not only in Juba but also across the country. **Salam Ja**, a song by Emmanuel Kembe, is always played; and the **Larakaraka**, performed by the Acholi Dance Group, is a dance that catches everyone's attention. ■

David Mono Danga is a Juba-based journalist and managing editor of *The Insider South Sudan*



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Get Out to Gethsemane: Daniel Kaluuya and LaKeith Stanfield play Black Panther leader and activist Fred Hampton and FBI informant William O'Neal, who helped to orchestrate Hampton's assassination by police in 1969.

Judas and the Black Messiah reclaims Black history

Wilfred Okiche

Shaka King's anticipated debut feature-length, *Judas and Black Messiah*, which premiered in the Spotlight section of the Sundance film festival, is somewhat of a Hollywood anomaly. It is a moderately priced, studio-backed prestige picture with a first-time African-American director at the helm that deals with Black history and Black historical figures.

If this isn't surprising enough then consider that *Judas and the Black Messiah* has no caucasian character to save the day while assuaging white fragility at the same time. J Edgar Hoover and the FBI are depicted in unflattering terms, as are the police. And the film seeks to correct

the narrative of the storied Black Panther group, presenting them not as gun-toting terrorists but as freedom fighters and community activists.

Must be a new day in Tinseltown.

King's *Judas and the Black Messiah* is an explosive account of the brief but impactful life of Fred Hampton, the charismatic leader of the Illinois chapter chairman of the Black Panther party, who was murdered by policemen. On the morning of December 4 1969, while resting with his pregnant partner.

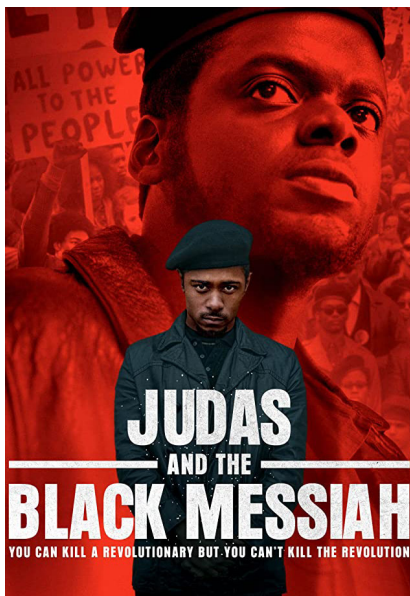
The film showcases the impressive talents of Daniel Kaluuya, the British actor of Ugandan descent. Coming off a string of successful films such as *Get Out* and *Black Panther*, Kaluuya brings a magnetic



presence to the role of Hampton, not only inhabiting the physical swagger but nailing his legendary oratory expertise and ability to organise, which underpinned the rise of his Rainbow Coalition of community groups. Kaluuya's is a performance of epic proportions, matched by the scene-stealing work of Dominique Fishback as Hampton's partner Deborah Johnson.

Eschewing conventional biopic framing, King's film leads into Hampton's life through the lens of William O'Neal (LaKeith Stanfield, making the most of an unknowable character), the FBI informant who infiltrated the Chicago Black Panther party and ultimately led Hampton to the slaughter.

King's film is both a character study of two very different men and a stylish neo-noir thriller that burns with righteousness and moral clarity. ■



Judas and the Black Messiah is in theatres and streaming on HBO Max

The race to stop Israel from selling weapons to Uganda

Sophie Neiman

A twisted tale involving secretive weapons deals, a bloody election, an urgent petition and an impending gag order unraveled thanks to social media, when Jerusalem-based human rights lawyer Eitay Mack spotted evidence of shady arms sales between Israel and Uganda on Twitter.

In a series of posts dating back to 2019, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and his son Muhoozi Kainerugaba shared images of Special Forces Command soldiers carrying Israeli-manufactured Galil-Ace and Tavor rifles and Uzi sub-machine guns. The first son headed the elite military unit between 2011 and 2017, and assumed command again last year.

“There is strong evidence that they got the weapons, they are using them, and they have the interest to show them off,” Mack told *The Continent*.

In a December petition, filed on behalf of Ugandan and Israeli activists, he called on the Israeli ministry of defence to halt weapons exports to Uganda, specifically asking the Defence Export Control Agency to revoke the licence that permits these sales.

Milton Allimadi, one of the petitioners and a prominent critic of Museveni, bluntly called Israel’s support of the Special

Forces Command “unconscionable.”

A hearing on the matter will take place in Tel Aviv next week.

A Brutal Military Unit

Founded in 2011, experts say the mysterious Special Forces Command acts at the will of the president. “[The Command] is essentially Museveni’s private army,” said author Helen Epstein, who has spent years documenting Ugandan government abuses. “It’s particularly gruesome and brutal,” she added.

The United States, which provides Uganda with some \$970-million annually according to the State Department, cut off all support to the Special Forces Command in 2016, citing human rights concerns.

A year later, the Special Forces Command raided Parliament during an opposition filibuster to stop Museveni from removing constitutional age limits, and attacked legislators.

Uganda’s recent election has also been marred by bloodshed, with scores of people killed in violent protests following the arrest of opposition presidential candidate Robert Kyagulanyi, better known as Bobi Wine, in November.

Museveni characterised these riots as an insurrection, and quietly handed control of the Special Forces Command

back to Kainerugaba, who had stepped down from his post in 2017 to act as a presidential advisor.

By late December, more than 100 members of Wine's campaign team had been arrested. Museveni hastily claimed victory in the January 14 elections, but a sweeping crackdown on dissent persists.

Opposition supporters have also reported a chilling spate of abductions across the country, with thousands of people missing according to Wine.

Tensions and suspicions are high. "It is only a matter of time before some authority publicly links the Special Forces Command to these atrocities," said Ugandan political analyst Angelo Izama.

An Enduring Friendship

Despite mounting allegations of human rights abuse, Museveni has a close ally in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Ugandan president in 2016 unveiled a memorial to Netanyahu's older brother Yonatan, an Israeli Defence Forces commander, who died rescuing hostages during Operation Entebbe 40 years earlier.

Netanyahu called his connection with Museveni a "real friendship" during a visit to Uganda last year. And this week Uganda joined Israel in condemning the International Criminal Court, after chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda began a probe into abuses committed in the Palestinian territories during the Gaza war of 2014.

Neither the Special Forces Command nor the Israeli Ministry of Defence responded to requests for comment from *The Continent*.

Don Wanyama, a senior press secretary for Museveni, took to Twitter Tuesday to share a letter apparently sent by Netanyahu, praising the Ugandan president's recent election victory, but deflected queries.

"What's there to comment about a congratulatory message? The grammar or what?" Wanyama wrote in a WhatsApp message. He did not immediately respond to questions about the nature of the diplomatic relationship between Uganda and Israel, nor Uganda's response to Mack's petition.

A Closed-Door Hearing

With a court hearing fast approaching, representatives of the Israeli state have insisted on arguing aspects of their case behind closed doors, saying it involves national security and foreign affairs.

This is not the first time Mack has taken the ministry of defence to court over weapons sales. Israel has a long history of questionable arms exports, including to President Salva Kiir during the South Sudanese Civil War, which claimed more than 50,000 lives.

Mack expects a gag order will be placed on the case, per another request from the defence ministry. "It 100 percent will happen," Mack said of looming restrictions.

Meanwhile, Ugandans are still reeling from a blood-stained election.

Stopping arms sales "would send a strong signal to Ugandans who are the victims of atrocities that have been committed with these weapons," said the petitioner, Allimadi. ■



The dichotomy of Dominic Ongwen

The brutality meted out to the infamous Ugandan warlord is almost as horrifying as that delivered by him

Andrew Arinaitwe and Eric Mwine-Mugaju

Even covered by a mask, Dominic Ongwen's face is unexpectedly cherub-like. This is the former child soldier turned notorious warlord who tormented Northern Uganda for several decades. Yet, dressed in a smart suit and blue-striped tie, waiting for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to deliver its verdict in The Hague last week, it is hard to square his unassuming demeanour with the harrowing and gruesome stories told by the survivors of the atrocities for which he was convicted.

On 61 counts of a possible 70, the court found 46-year-old Ongwen guilty. The charges included murder, attempted murder, torture, enslavement, forced marriage, rape, sexual slavery, enslavement, forced pregnancy and conscripting children as child soldiers. Although no sentence has been handed down, he is likely to spend decades in prison.

The Continent watched the court proceedings in Coorom, a village in Amuru District in northern Uganda. Most of the straw-roofed huts were deserted, as residents crowded into the community centre, where a TV had been set up, or thronged under a tree around a radio.



Johnson Odongo, in the blue shirt, listens as the verdict against his nephew is delivered
(Photo: Kelvin Kavuma/The Continent)

This area, not far from the borders with South Sudan, has suffered enormously at the hands of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) – the feared militia group in which Ongwen rose to second-in-command, answering only to leader Joseph Kony himself. Some of Coorom's own men, women and children have been killed, raped and enslaved by the LRA.

But there was no jubilation when the verdict against Ongwen was delivered. For he is no stranger to Coorom. He is a son of this soil.

A normal child

Johnson Odongo clearly remembers his nephew's childhood in Coorom, known in Acholi as Apur Kii Pii, the place where you can dig to find water. The surname Ongwen, in Acholi, means "born during the white ant season".

"He would help clean the compound in the morning, take the goats to graze in the bush and later bring them back. A normal child who loved playing with other kids in the yard," he told *The Continent*. He was helpful around his father's house, respected his elders and aspired to become a priest. There was nothing in his behaviour then that suggested the horrific crimes that he would go on to commit.

Odongo testified to this in The Hague, in Ongwen's defence. Like others who knew him as a boy, Odongo believes that Ongwen is as much a victim as he was a perpetrator – and that there are other ways to obtain justice, ones that rely on local customs and traditions rather than the mysterious rules of a western-style courtroom in a foreign country many thousands of miles away.

An average student, Dominic Ongwen was just starting Grade 3 at a nearby school when he was kidnapped by Kony's newly-formed LRA. He

was nine or ten years old, by most accounts. His elder brothers rushed home to tell the family. His mother was inconsolable. Neither parent saw their son again: his mother, Rosette Lalar, was killed shortly afterwards in another LRA attack, while his father, Paul Opobo, was killed three years later by Ugandan government forces, after being mistaken for a rebel.

The 1980s were a period of great political turbulence in Uganda, following the fall of Idi Amin in 1979. Even after the conclusion of the Bush War (1980-1986), which brought current president Yoweri Museveni to power, many defeated fighters fled to the north, where conflict and instability continued, including brutal reprisals from the government. It is against this backdrop that Joseph Kony, a former altar boy, formed the Lord's Resistance Army. While initially formed to fight against the government, the LRA would turn against Kony's own people – the Acholi – to “purify” them.

In the decades since, the LRA has become the most feared militia group in East Africa, operating in the border regions between Uganda, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic. Like Ongwen, Kony is wanted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the ICC; unlike Ongwen, he's still a free man.

Rising through the ranks

Along with Ongwen, the LRA kidnapped two other boys that day. Joe Kakanyero was one of them, and he recalls the terrifying forced march back to the LRA camp. “Sometimes we got sick and tired; we were beaten, but we survived. Ongwen was often beaten because he was not walking very fast,” Kakanyero told *The Continent*. He was a little older than Ongwen, and tried to look out for him.

At the LRA camp – in a story reminiscent of the Hollywood blockbuster *Beast of No Nation* – the young Ongwen was assigned to the household of Vincent Otti, who was then Kony's deputy. It was from Otti, his “mentor”, that Ongwen learnt the ruthlessness that would one day set him apart. Otti would later be executed in mysterious circumstances, with some reports suggesting it was Kony himself who ordered his death.

The young boys kidnapped by the LRA were subjected to psychological and physical trauma designed to break their ties to the outside world. “The first thing they instruct you to do when they capture you is to kill your parents,” said Fred Obita, another survivor of an LRA abduction. “That was the first test to put that hatred in you and make you feel you now have nothing to lose in this world.”

Several qualities set Ongwen apart. One was his apparent dutifulness;



Hollywood: *Beasts of No Nation* (starring Idris Elba) tells a story all too similar to Ongwen's real life experience

the personality of the young boy destined to be a priest was perfectly suited to the LRA's cult-like atmosphere. Another was his aptitude for combat. "Ongwen's prowess on the battlefield was renowned within the LRA," wrote Kjell Anderson, the author of a forthcoming biography of Ongwen, in *The Conversation*. "He was a courageous fighter and seen by many of his colleagues as a fair and adept commander."

Moses Okello remembers Ongwen's willingness to lead daring missions, unlike other abductees-turned-commanders who were captured at an older age. Okello was abducted by the LRA in the mid-1990s, and escaped eight years later. "Being captured at such a tender age, you can [be made to] do anything. I know he was a child soldier just like me and many others."

But Ongwen's rise through the ranks was also pragmatic, says Okello. Kony was running out of options. "By the time I escaped in 2004, he was just a junior commander. Many commanders defected, meaning those who remained were forced to assume top positions."

By 2007, Ongwen's importance to Kony became clear to the rest of the world. At a failed peace conference in Juba, in what is now South Sudan, Kony met with South Sudanese rebel leader (and now vice-president) Riek Machar. At Kony's side, having just completed a punishing trek from northern Uganda into South Sudan via the eastern DRC, was Dominic

Ongwen. “He was not seated, but was moving up and down. It appeared that he was checking the security of the venue. He was serious-looking, with a Rastafarian hairstyle,” said Alphonse Owiny-Dollo, the current chief justice of Uganda, who was there that day.

Escape and captivity

In 2005, prosecutors at the ICC charged Ongwen with war crimes and crimes against humanity. The United States offered a \$5-million reward for information leading to his capture. But it was the breakdown of Ongwen’s relationship with the infamously capricious Kony that eventually led him to The Hague. He escaped detention by Kony in 2014, and fled into the Central African Republic where he was picked up by the Seleka, another rebel group, who alerted US special forces. An American helicopter was swiftly dispatched to collect Ongwen, who was transferred into Ugandan custody and then to The Hague.

The Seleka, unaware of the bounty on Ongwen, was never paid.

After being captured, Ongwen spoke briefly to Ugandan media, describing what it was like to work for Joseph Kony. “He only wants to be the chief and for you to work for him like a slave, for him and his family. See, now even officers are made to carry his food and luggage.”

At his trial, the case for the prosecution was overwhelming. There was little dispute that Ongwen had committed the atrocities attributed to him, the brutality of which cannot be downplayed. As Human Rights Watch’s Elise Keppler recounted: “Girls and women had to choose between forced marriage to Ongwen and other LRA fighters, and death. They had no option but to leave babies in the bush so they could carry LRA loads. Abductees were forced to kill other abductees or be killed themselves. They walked barefoot through the bush and “shook with fear” that they would be killed if they could no longer continue. Ongwen planned and executed attacks on camps for displaced people as Ugandan forces fled the scene. Civilians were shot, burned, and beaten to death. Houses were set on fire and bodies were strewn across the camps.”

His defence rested not on his innocence, but on the argument that Ongwen was himself a victim.

In his opening statement in 2018, lead defence lawyer Krispus Ayena Odongo – also from northern Uganda – said: “Children abducted by LRA, the accused inclusive, and used in the war in northern Uganda grew up in one of the most brutal environments, never before known to humanity, with little room for moral development that would enable him to later take independent decisions. Given the nature of the LRA and



The courtroom in The Hague, a continent away from where Ongwen's crimes were committed
(Photo: ICC)

their modus operandi, we shall show that Dominic Ongwen's presumed culpability is a sham."

Last week, this line of defence was decisively rejected by the ICC's judges, who found that Ongwen was a "fully responsible adult" who had chosen to remain in the LRA despite opportunities to leave.

The verdict will be appealed. But at home, not everyone is convinced that justice has been served.

"The mode of accountability you see in the ICC is alien to us. We cannot say because it has gone through the ICC, then it is a form of justice for us," said Ambrose Oola, the prime minister of Ker Kwaro Acholi, a significant cultural institution in Acholiland, in an interview with the *International Justice Monitor*.

Speaking later to *The Continent*, Oola said that the Acholi have their own traditions of delivering justice; traditions that may have been able to take Ongwen's cognitive state into account, as well as his dual victim-perpetrator status.

Among the Acholi, Jok [Gods or divine spirits] and ancestors guide the moral order. If a wrong is committed, the Jok send misfortune and illness until appropriate actions are taken by elders and offenders. Both parties perform cleansing rituals, such as Mato-oput ("to drink the bitter root", where a potion of herbs is consumed to symbolise the blood spilled and the bitterness of conflict); and Gomo tong ("the bending of the spears", to mark the end of hostilities).

"It is a long, drawn out tradition in Acholi that there are processes and practices to deal with such individuals. The element of stigmatisation is minimal, and nobody even remembers what they did while in the LRA," said Oola. "The community has accepted worse people than Ongwen." ■

(Photo: Bartosz Hadyaniak/Getty Images)



How did I do?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we will send you the answers immediately.

0-4

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

9-12

"I'm on the agenda of the next AU summit."

SO, YOU THINK YOU'RE A REAL PAN-AFRICAN?

Take this quiz to find out how much you really know about our continent

1. Modern-day southern Nigeria was known as which empire from 1440 to 1897?
2. In which country did Kwame Nkrumah live in exile?
3. What is the largest city and main port of Burundi?
4. Haut Katanga is a province in which central African country?
5. Which former president's autobiography was titled *Long Walk to Freedom*?
6. Trajan's Arch (pictured) is found in which country?
7. Which country won the 2020 Total African Nations Championship?
8. Djembe and dundun are variations of what kind of African instrument?
9. What is Eritrea's currency?
10. True or false: Senegal's flag features a yellow star in the middle.
11. Isabel dos Santos is the eldest child of which former president?
12. What African artiodactyl mammal is the world's tallest living terrestrial animal?

Letter from the heart

Samira Sawlani

Dearest reader,

Valentine's Day is here at last, and not only is love in the air, it's in this very column. I have written it just for you.

I've been inspired, you see. By the love our leaders have confessed to us, their hearts so full and overflowing.

President Idriss Deby for example. So in love is he with the people of Chad that he has agreed to extend his 30 years in power and run for a sixth term when April comes around.

When making the announcement he said he'd come to this decision after much "mature introspection" (steady on, Romeo, there are ladies present), and decided he must respond to "the call of the people". (Meanwhile some of us can't even get a text back.)

Of course any *déclaration d'amour* must be followed with a gift, *non*? That came in the form of some *eau d'tear gas* generously spritzed over Déby's beloved nation, many of whom had taken to the streets in a display of assertive heartbreak over this display of apparently everlasting love. (He thinks the masses doth protest too much.)

Not to be outdone, fellow president Yoweri Museveni has opened not just his heart, but also the internet access his government switched off nearly a month



Love is in the hair: Cameroon's President Paul Biya with First Lady Chantal Biya.

ago! Now, at last, ordinary Ugandans can open up their DMs and shoot their shot online, as opposed to his security forces, who can hopefully take a break from shooting their shots with live ammunition.

The science of love

Where there's love, there's chemistry, which must make President John Magufuli of Tanzania an expert on romance, considering he has a PhD in the subject. Chemistry, that is.

His doctrine must surely be in the romantic kind of chemistry, though, because he doesn't seem to know his way around the scientific variety, otherwise he would surely not have told Tanzanians not to trust vaccines. They do say that love is blind, though, so that might be why he can't see any Covid-19 in the country.

Valentine's Day xalwo and mandaazis are unlikely to be exchanged between Somalia and Kenya this year. Tensions (and not the good kind) are on the bubble again, prompting Somalia to suspend diplomatic relations with its neighbours. The full silent treatment.

As Kenya continues to deny meddling with Somalia's internal affairs, the two are set to meet at the International Criminal Court next month ... A box of chocolates won't fix this one, we fear.

As Kenya continues to deny meddling with Somalia's internal affairs, the two are set to meet at the International Court of Justice next month where proceedings over their long-running maritime dispute are set to begin. A box of chocolates won't

fix this one, we fear.

According to the unofficial president's guidebook, once you're a Big Man in Power you have to give appropriately powerful gifts to your beloved. A new role in government might work, or a lengthy stay at the intercontinental hotel in Geneva might do the trick. Let's just say that Chantal Biya is one lucky lady, for example.

Framed in fearful symmetry

Wish we could say the same for the people of Tigray. There's not much we CAN say for them – we just don't know what's going on. According to the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, 80% of Tigray remains unreachable and cut off from aid, and thousands of people are potentially at risk of starving to death.

We commend the Red Cross and other Ethiopian aid workers, as well as the health workers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, whose hearts must be newly broken after confirming two cases of Ebola in North Kivu, just three months after the last outbreak there was declared to be over.

They, along with all those serving on the front lines of the Covid-19 pandemic, are a reminder that our doctors, nurses, EMTs and all health workers and hospital support staff across the continent deserve our love and appreciation. More: they deserve proper wages, decent hours and the right equipment to let them do their jobs so we can all live to love another day.

Till that day comes, I remain
Your faithful columnist ■

The hassle of the hustle: A guide to (not) getting paid in Nigeria

I'm not a terrorist or a drug dealer. I'm not trying to overthrow the government. It should not be this hard.

Vincent Desmond

A few weeks ago, a freelance payment I was expecting was sent to the PayPal address I provided.

It's not easy to get Paypal in Nigeria, but a friend kindly agreed to let me use hers. She would transfer the funds to my bank account using a remittance service like Transferwise or World Remit.

Most of these services allow for cash pick-ups, or mobile money deposits linked to your phone. Some can also deposit straight into your bank account. They certainly could here in Nigeria... until two months ago.

No money, no problems

On December 4, the Central Bank of Nigeria announced a new policy. Widely assumed to be in response to #EndSARS protests, the CBN instructed banks to limit all remittances to "domiciliary" accounts that let you receive foreign currency and exchange it to naira. But to get one you need multiple references, and a minimum deposit of \$100.

Without one, the bank can still pay you

in foreign currency, but you must hand over your ID, fill out forms and pick it up over the counter. Either way, a long and odious paper trail that leaves you squarely in the state's sights.

Even if you aren't their target, the hassle starts to outweigh the hustle.

It left Nigerians in the diaspora and families back home high and dry, unable to send money back and forth, not to mention those living here but earning abroad – like freelance journalists writing for *The Continent*.

I was stuck.

Welcome to the global economy

Then somebody suggested I try SendCash. Owned by BuyCoins, it let Nigerians buy and sell cryptocurrencies with their debit cards. I signed up with little fuss, and soon was able to access the funds I was owed. Payment received!

According to stats published by its CEO, Timi Ajiboye, BuyCoins processed crypto transactions totalling more than \$140-million in 2020. And after the December crackdown, SendCash became the go-to for many Nigerians



Cryptic: The Central Bank of Nigeria HQ in Abuja

abroad trying to send money home, and for remote workers and freelancers trying to get paid.

“The goal is to enable Nigerians and Africans to participate in the global economy,” said Ire Aderinokun, a developer at BuyCoins.

Good news for ordinary people trying to make a living. For central banks? Not so much. Their job is to manage the economy, after all. But sometimes the responsibility to manage gives way to the urge to control, which brings us to last Friday.

Putting the ‘ban’ in ‘bank’

On February 5, the CBN suddenly issued another circular telling banks that cryptocurrency was now prohibited, and told them to please send over a list of anyone dealing in crypto – and close their accounts while they were about it.

Bitcoin was banned.

I reached out to the CBN to ask how they thought it might affect citizens abroad, and international trade, but they didn’t get back to me.

However, according to Abubakar Idris, a journalist at Stears Business, the CBN is sticking to its story that blocking cryptocurrencies will help prevent fraud and the financing of terrorism.

“These are legitimate concerns,” Idris told me. But there are also other motivations in play. “The most crucial is CBN’s focus on stabilising the exchange rate. Cryptocurrency gave people a way to get better exchange rates, rendering central control measures ineffective,” he said. “So now the CBN wants to take that control back.”

It worked. The only way to transfer money to a Nigerian bank account now is to send it through traditional channels, and the person receiving it has to go to a bank to cash it, filling out the forms and offering up their identity documents.

And, so, Bitcoin is dead.

For now.

“Startups are already developing workarounds,” said Idris. “I actually believe the CBN’s policy has made crypto more popular.”

In other words, watch this cyberspace. ■

TikTok grows, but at what cost?

The Chinese social media app may be the only place where cute dance videos intersect with geopolitical tensions

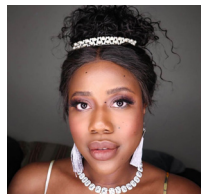
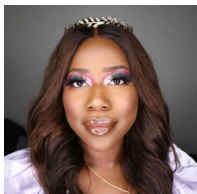
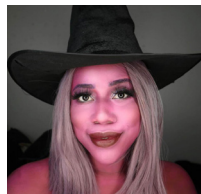
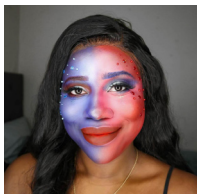
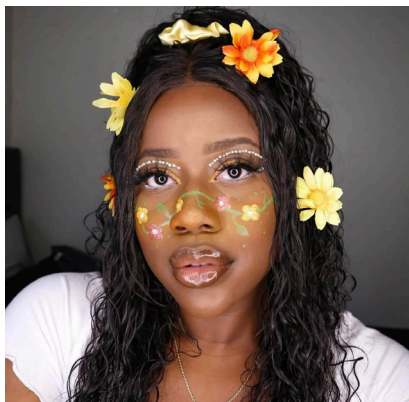
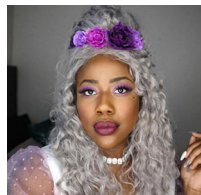
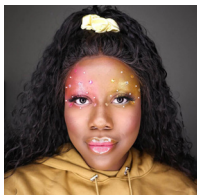
Aaisha Dadi Patel

A young woman smiles sweetly at the camera, covers her lens, and then reveals leopard-print eyelids. Another positions an empty drink can in her hair as a curler.

Foyin Ogunrombi, a 24-year-old Nigerian-South African lifestyle influencer, promoted the #7days7faces make-up challenge, which ran four times in 2020 and featured seven thematic make-up looks over seven days, on Instagram and Twitter. She got a reach of over seven million impressions on Twitter and 4,000 tags on Instagram. But it was on TikTok that it took on a life of its own.

“I didn’t expect when doing #7days7faces that people would be posting about it on TikTok, let alone that my little challenge’s hashtag would get close to 300,000 views there,” says Ogunrombi.

As the pandemic spread, so did TikTok’s popularity. Launched in 2018 when ByteDance merged with Musical.ly,



#7days7faces: With more than 300 000 views of her make-up TikToks, Foyin Ogunrombi is a social media maven who deserves the title ‘influencer’. She is also emblematic of the growing power and reach of social media in Africa.

the Chinese smartphone app surpassed two billion downloads globally at the end of April 2020. As many countries went into lockdown, TikTok offered an entertaining means of escapism.

TikTok was in the top 10 most downloaded apps of 2020 in South Africa across both iOS and Android devices, according to Gadgets Africa. TikTok could not be reached for official comment on what statistics looked like prior to and after lockdown, but in October 2020 it signed an agreement with influencer marketing platform Webfluential to bolster the app as a platform working with African creatives across the continent.

Speaking to *The Continent*, Webfluential declined to offer figures but said that “interest in the available TikTok product offerings for brands has been extremely successful”.

‘A blunt approach’

As TikTok’s reach in Africa has grown, so have concerns about its controversial history of moderation – and fears of potential censorship.

The app has come under repeated scrutiny for its moderation policies. First reported by *The Guardian* in late 2019, documents published by The Intercept in March reveal TikTok policies including the “Ugly Content Policy” — which barred content showing “abnormal body shape”, “ugly facial looks” and “shabby” shooting environments, including slums — and “Live Policy”, which governed controversial content related to sexual, political and dangerous content.

Under the Live Policy, specifics include

“defamation, spoofing, or criticism against civil servants, political or religious leaders” and “documents, images and videos that undermine national unity.” An investigation by the *Guardian* newspaper in 2019 revealed that the app restricted mention of politically sensitive subjects in China, including mentions of Tiananmen Square, Tibetan independence, or the banned religious group Falun Gong.

As TikTok’s reach has grown, so have concerns about its controversial history of moderation

According to TikTok, these policies were outdated as of May 2019. “In TikTok’s early days we took a blunt approach to minimising conflict on the platform”, the company said, adding that “the old guidelines in question are outdated and no longer in use”.

But the potential for censorship could make TikTok attractive to authoritarian governments – some of whom are already seeking to restrict the digital space.

“African governments do not shy away from censorship or content regulation once political and cultural issues are involved,” says Ufuoma Akpojivi, head of the University of the Witwatersrand’s department of media studies.

“Governments want to determine or control the information that their citizens receive or share to ensure that it doesn’t become a platform to communicate dissent and to be in accordance with the national interest.” ■

President Kenyatta will rotate power to a different ethnic group – but which one?

Scovian Lillian

As President Uhuru Kenyatta's tenure comes to a close ahead of general elections in 2022, the race to replace him is heating up. There is now a broad consensus that Kenyatta will not honour promises to support Deputy President William Ruto to replace him. Instead, he will throw his weight – either officially or unofficially – behind one of the other leaders within the increasingly bloated Jubilee Party government. The question is: Which one?

There is considerable pressure on Kenyatta from within his own ethnic community to facilitate the rise of another Kikuyu to the top job. But the president himself has signaled he favours rotating power to another ethnic group in the interests of national unity. This was why, he said, he agreed to the “handshake” that ended the dispute over the 2017 general elections by bringing long-time opposition leader Raila Odinga into government.

Responding to suggestions that some Kenyans are tired of the political dominance of “family dynasties”, Kenyatta added: “If indeed those complaining that they are tired of certain families in leadership ... I can as well stand and say that there are only two tribes that have dominated power and

maybe it's time for another tribe to rule.”

If Kenyatta does back a leader from another community, it would be a case of history repeating itself. Uhuru's father, Jomo Kenyatta, supported a constitutional succession during the final months of his life in 1978, which helped to ensure that Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin, was his replacement. But it remains unknown who Uhuru will choose if he follows in his father's footsteps.

The current favorite is Odinga, but this would be an unpopular choice in parts of the Kikuyu community that have not forgiven him for past controversies. A more recent suggestion is that Kenyatta could reach outside of Jubilee to Amani National Congress leader Musalia Mudavadi – but a similar deal fell apart in 2013 when Kenyatta humiliated the Luhya leader by renegeing on a deal, and Mudavadi will be wary of being burned again.

One thing is for sure: whoever Kenyatta backs, it will likely divide opinion and the Jubilee Party itself. ■

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The Big Picture

Urban desert: The northern Algerian port city of Oran was engulfed in a cloud of dust during a sand storm in early February. This part of the continent is no stranger to sandstorms, which are caused when strong winds lift large amounts of sand from the Sahara Desert into the atmosphere; but the intensity and frequency of these meteorological phenomena are predicted to sharply increase as global temperatures rise. (Photo: AFP)

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