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Is Mali on the brink of a revolution?

Government rocked by massive protests

Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP

Avoiding the ego trip

Malawi has been widely lauded for the manner in which its people, and its institutions, protected its democracy when it was threatened by a president with autocratic tendencies.

For the political opposition, the key to achieving an electoral victory so comprehensive that it could not be rigged away was the formation of a coalition, led by Lazarus Chakwera. He is now the president of Malawi, but perhaps the real hero of this story is Saulos Chilima: a rival opposition leader who set aside his own presidential ambitions – and his ego – to make the coalition work.

Other political leaders would do well to ponder Chilima's example. In Uganda, Bobi Wine made it clear this week that he is fully supportive of an opposition coalition to unseat President Yoweri Museveni in 2021 – but only if he gets to lead it (see p12). Could his insistence on being first on the ticket threaten the chances of the opposition forming a viable united front? And if so, would he be prepared to set his ego aside and play second fiddle?

And in Côte d'Ivoire, speculation is rife that – following the death of his hand-picked successor – President Alassane Ouattara is considering

running for a third term in office (see p15). Doing so would dramatically heighten tensions ahead of what is already expected to be a volatile electoral period, and for what purpose? If Ouattara really believes that there is no one else capable of running the country, then his sense of self-importance must be getting in the way of his ability to make sensible decisions.

Perhaps the real hero of Malawi's election story is Saulos Chilima: a rival opposition leader who set aside his own presidential ambitions – and his ego – to make the coalition work

Of course, an outsized ego is key to the success of many politicians – it takes remarkable self-confidence for anyone to believe that they can govern an entire country. The difference between a good politician and a great politician, however, is the ability to set that ego aside when the situation demands it. ■



Wrong direction: Earlier this week, Zambia's President Edgar Lungu posted this photograph on Facebook. "I am impressed with the progress report on the Kafue – Mazabuka road earmarked for completion by October 2020," he said proudly. Except this is not a photograph of the Kafue – Mazabuka road. It is, in fact, a stock photo, used previously in an article about roads in Lagos State, Nigeria. Once the mistake was pointed out in the comments, the photo was quietly replaced with another one.

Inside:

- **COVER STORY:** After a day of massive unrest, protesters occupied Mali's national broadcaster (p8). A meeting between the president and the imam leading the protests (p30) failed to calm tensions.
- **Nigeria:** The anti-corruption boss had one job... (p9)
- **Malawi's new cabinet** is a family affair (p14)
- After the PM's death, **Côte d'Ivoire's president has a decision to make** (p15)
- **Our first illustrated story:** "2020 started like any other year..." (p21)

In the headlines this week

Samira Sawlani



Ghana and Zimbabwe

Some say love is like a river. Unfortunately for Zimbabwe's minister for health, Obediah Moyo, the river in question appears to be the crocodile-infested Zambezi.

Someone must have fallen out of love with him, because Moyo has found himself out of a job after he was arrested and charged with corruption in connection with a multimillion-dollar Covid-19 equipment procurement scandal.

This prompted the government to tell him: "It's not me, it's you." Love is tender, love is kind. But love isn't a kind of tender, so maybe they have a point. Or an excuse?

Just like love, you can't hurry quarantine. Carlos Kingsley Ahenkorah,

Ghana's deputy minister for trade and industry (pictured left), just couldn't wait, however, and has had to resign after venturing out before his Covid-19 self-isolation was over.

Word on the street is that he was given a "jump or be pushed" ultimatum. Which suggests the government is not willing to entertain any toxic relationships – unlike a certain "bromance" in the United Kingdom. Boris Johnson and Dominic Cummings could learn a thing or two from Ghana, but apparently their love is blind – no wonder Dom kept having to go driving to "check his eyesight".

Malawi

The newest prez on the block, Malawi's Lazarus Chakwera, spoke his vows this week in a small, intimate ceremony. Promising to fight corruption, he swore to meet with the leader of the opposition once every three months, declare his assets, and appear in parliament to answer questions about his handling of state affairs.

He also announced a 31-member cabinet. But there have been grumblings over "family connections" in some of the appointments (see p14). Here's hoping Chakwera does not go breaking his country's heart.

Confrontation: Protesters in Nairobi were met with a violent police response (Photo: Billy Mutai)



Madagascar and Burundi

Often, love requires admitting when you are wrong. They aren't apologising out loud, but the actions of Madagascar and Burundi's leaders speak louder than words.

Madagascar is the home of the "miracle" tonic hailed by President Andry Rajoelina as a preventative and cure for Covid-19. And yet this week the government bashfully placed the Analamanga region – including the capital Antananarivo – back in lockdown amid a surge in cases. The presidency also denied that Rajoelina is unwell with the virus, insisting he is in the country and in good health.

Mass testing also began in Burundi this week after the President Evariste Ndayishimiye described Covid-19 as the country's biggest enemy, a distinct change of heart considering he previously exhorted Burundians not to worry about the coronavirus because "God loves Burundi".

Kenya

On July 7 1990, Kenyans took to the streets demanding multiparty democracy, reforms and justice, and the Moi government responded with deadly violence. Despite the bloodshed, Saba-Saba Day, as it is called, was a pivotal moment in the undoing of the regime.

As the country marked the 30th anniversary this week, activists led protests over police brutality and demanded full implementation of the Constitution so that people have access to basic rights. Many were teargassed, arrested and beaten by security forces. A terrible irony, considering the day.

Ultimately, the protesters in Kenya then and now show us that the real meaning of true love – for your country and its people – is to not be blind to your flaws.

Truly, it's not about hearts, roses and empty promises, it's about honesty, courage and care. ■

The Week in Numbers

35%

The percentage of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Covid-19 response budget being paid to "mafia networks" as "kickbacks". This claim was made by deputy health minister Albert M'peti Biyombo in a letter to the prime minister, which was leaked. Biyombo claimed that his boss, health minister Eteni Longondo, has not been following due process when awarding funding.

3,500

The number of arrests made in Ethiopia during and following last week's unrest, in which 239 people were killed. Details of what exactly happened remain scarce, and there is no new information on who may have been responsible for the assassination of the celebrated singer Hachalu Hundessa, which sparked the violence.

49,000,000

The number of Africans that could be pushed into extreme poverty by the coronavirus pandemic, according to the African Development Bank. The bank said that west and central Africa are most vulnerable to the economic slump. There is a ray of hope, however: the bank forecasts that Africa's economies will bounce back in 2021.

\$12,740

The Gross National Income per person in Mauritius in 2019. The figure means that Mauritius this week became only the second African country to be recognised as a high-income country by the World Bank, after the Seychelles. Benin and Tanzania were also among the countries



Island life: Port Louis by night (Photo: Peter Kuchar)

that improved their classification, both moving from the low income to the lower-middle income bracket.

4,200

The number of Covid-19 tests carried out per million people in Africa, according to data analysed by Reuters. This compares unfavourably with Asia (7,650 tests per million) and Europe (74,255). "Even at the best of times, collecting quality data from countries is not easy because people are stretched thin," said John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control.

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DEVELOPING STORY



Protesters storm Mali's state broadcaster

Simon Allison

According to reports emerging from the capital Bamako on Friday evening, huge anti-government protests turned violent as protesters attempted to storm several government buildings in a bid to force the president out of office.

The state broadcaster, Office of Radio and Television of Mali (ORTM), went off air as the building was occupied. Reuters reported: “A journalist inside the ORTM building told Reuters by telephone that she was preparing her newscast when protesters stormed the building and that people were asked to barricade themselves in their offices.”

Protesters also attempted to occupy the National Assembly, demanding the resignation of President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta as they did so. “Several offices have been ransacked, documents destroyed, property taken away. The police were forced to shoot,” an official

with the National Assembly told *Le Monde Afrique*.

At least one person was reportedly killed, and 20 injured.

President Keïta's government has been under enormous pressure in recent months, thanks to the worsening economy and a deteriorating security situation.

AFP reported that opposition leaders on Friday also published a ten-point document calling for civil disobedience. “Recommendations for actions laid out in the document included not paying fines, blocking entry to state buildings – except hospitals – and occupying crossroads.”

This is a developing story. For more context – to understand why the protests are happening and who is leading them – read our report page 30, written before Friday's escalation. ■

Nigeria

Anti-corruption boss arrested for...corruption

Aanu Adeoye

Ibrahim Magu had one job. By definition, Magu's position requires him to not be corrupt. After all, as acting chairman of Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the government body whose sole function is to investigate and prosecute financial crimes, it would be incredibly ironic if he were alleged to be involved in financial crimes. It would be like finding out your town's chief firefighter also moonlights as a notorious arsonist in his spare time.

But Nigeria is a place of wonder. It's a country where seemingly contradictory events can both be true at the same time. So it was with great surprise, and simultaneously no surprise at all, that Magu was arrested on Monday.

Magu's troubles began in June when he was accused in a memo by the minister of justice, Abubakar Malami, of re-looting recovered funds and "insubordination and misconduct."

But it's easy to see why many did not think this memo would amount to much. Memos are a familiar weapon in the internecine world of Nigerian politics. They're never made public but are always conveniently leaked to the press.

As things stand, Magu is still in custody, his two residences in the capital already searched by security agents. He has been relieved of his duties as the head of the anti-graft agency.

In June, Magu was accused of re-looting recovered funds

But Buhari cannot act surprised that his man has been brought down. Magu's official title was "acting chairman" of the EFCC for a reason: the Senate had twice refused to confirm his appointment, partly for political considerations but partly because of allegations that he had suspicious links to a prominent businessman, Umar Mohammed.

The question now is why Buhari decided to take action after five years of sticking by his man. The opposition People's Democratic Party, which has called for Magu's prosecution, surely wants answers – and so does the rest of the country. ■

Zimbabwe



Unfollow the leader

Campaigners urge Zimbabweans to cancel the president on Twitter.

Kudzai Mashininga

Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa had 565,000 followers on Twitter last week. As of Wednesday, he was down to 542,000 – losing more than 23,000 followers in less than a week.

The reduction in social media support is the result of a concerted campaign by government critics to persuade people to unfollow the president's account. A fight back from his supporters saw him rise to 542,400 by Friday.

“Dictatorships thrive on public validation. Unfollowing is a great form of resistance against his corrupt rule... It is public rejection which he can't

rig! Retweet and unfollow,” tweeted Hopewell Chin'ono, a prominent journalist.

Also on Twitter, Mnangagwa's spokesperson George Charamba commented on the campaign.

“What a BALD propaganda gesture!! The President of Zimbabwe can never be deserted by people he never had in the first place.”

Social media has been a major battleground between supporters and opponents of Zimbabwe's governments over the last few years – especially as protesting in public has become more difficult thanks to government restrictions and intimidation.

Online activists have created hugely influential social media campaigns, including #ThisFlag and #Tajamuka/#Sesijikile, which have drawn a large following. These have translated into real-world action – and consequences. #ThisFlag leader Evan Mawarire was charged with treason, allegedly for trying to topple the former government of President Robert Mugabe.

In March 2018, President Mnangagwa told his supporters to take social media seriously. “We are not techno-savvy. Don't be beaten to the game. Get in there and dominate social media,” he said to a rally of the ruling Zanu-PF's Youth League. ■

South Africa

Infections surge as people start to relax

Athandiwe Saba

Gauteng is South Africa's most populous province, home to 15.2-million people and the major cities of Johannesburg and Pretoria. It has also become the country's Covid-19 hotspot, with more than 55,000 people currently infected – that is more active cases than the whole of Egypt, which has a population of 90-million.

Infections have risen dramatically in recent weeks. Bruce Mellado, a Wits University professor who sits on the Gauteng Premier's advisory team, said that this has coincided with a flurry of reports of people not complying with Covid-19 containment guidelines.

"There is a clear correlation between adherence and the number of people infected," said Mellado.

Dr Shabir Madhi, a professor of vaccinology who is leading South Africa's vaccine trials, agrees: "The reproductive rate of the virus is also largely dependent on people adhering to non-pharmaceutical interventions. So if

people do not wear face masks, choose to go into crowded areas, sit in taxis 100% occupied – all of this lends itself to the escalation in the rate of infection... Unfortunately, the majority of people simply do not take the virus seriously enough."

The provincial department of health is pushing for stricter enforcement of regulations, including reinstating limitations on the sale of alcohol.

Gauteng provincial spokesperson Thabo Masebe said that the police and army would be roped in to make sure that people are following the rules, including in shopping centres and workplaces. "People are now visiting friends and family and that is still not allowed ... It's almost as if things are back to normal."

'There is a clear correlation between adherence and the number of infections'

For Professor Madhi, the quickest way to slow infections is for everyone to wear face masks. "The single most important intervention the government can make is to make it compulsory for everyone to wear a face mask. If people don't wear a face mask there should be penalties," he said. ■

Uganda

Bobi Wine presents his presidential credentials

Simon Allison

Last month, Uganda's two most prominent opposition leaders announced that they would consider joining forces to compete against President Yoweri Museveni in the 2021 presidential election.

Most analysts suggest that only by working together can veteran Kizza Besigye's Forum for Democratic Change and Bobi Wine's People Power hope to unseat Museveni, who has been in office since 1986.

One crucial detail was not addressed, however: which of the two men would be the presidential candidate?

On Wednesday, Bobi Wine – real name Robert Kagulanyi – said that he was in the strongest position to lead any opposition coalition. “We [opposition leaders] all agree in principle that we need to field one candidate. What we are yet to agree about is whether they are joining us,” he said.

Wine said that Uganda needed a youthful leader. “Uganda's dynamic

being that more than 80 percent are young people, then a young person will do better, a very well known household name will do better,” he said. Wine made his name as one of Uganda's most famous musicians, before he turned his hand to politics in 2017.

“I am confident to inform you that President Museveni is meeting a competitor like never before,” Wine said. “I am an artist and have been performing for the last 20 years. I am a household name. I am in everybody's living room, including President Museveni's.”

Wine was speaking on the inaugural edition of the Resistance Bureau podcast, which “brings together leading activists, civil society representatives, lawyers, journalists and political leaders from all parts of the continent to share perspectives and strategies on how to effectively resist authoritarianism and repression.” ■



Red head Wine: The opposition leader says his youth gives him the edge

(Photo: Luke Dray / Getty Images)



Photo story

Blowing in the wind

Refiloe Seiboko

If you happen to be in the southeastern regions of the United States and have noticed out-of-the-ordinary skies recently, it's because some pretty extraordinary atmospheric enchantments have been quietly occurring above us. To what alchemy do we owe the stunning sunsets people have recorded lately? Dust. And lots of it. Weeks ago, an enormous dust cloud, the biggest in decades, lifted itself from the Sahara and blew all the way across the Atlantic, creating remarkable scenes and strokes of vibrant colour in the sky in the process. Scientists say it's causality. We say it's just Africa showing off, yet again, what it can produce with something as simple as dust. ■ (Photo by Yamil Lage/AFP via Getty Images)

News Analysis

Malawi's new president defends controversial cabinet

Golden Matonga in Lilongwe

When Lazarus Chakwera was inaugurated as president of Malawi – after a tumultuous period in the country's history – he promised that his administration would be a new dawn for a government plagued by corruption, favouritism and nepotism.

Then he announced his cabinet. “It's fair to say the reaction has been mostly negative,” said Boniface Dulani, the lead researcher at the Institute of Public Opinion and Research.

Many Malawians were surprised at the ministerial appointments of a rich, powerful couple; a son of a former president; and two siblings. Critics have also noted various conflicts of interest: the new minister of mining comes from a family that owns mines; the new minister of information owns a major broadcasting network (and is the sister-in-law of the new deputy agriculture minister).

On Thursday, a prominent civil society grouping, the Human Rights Defenders Coalition, visited Chakwera to spell out their concerns.

Danwood Chirwa, a law professor at Cape Town University, is among the critics of the new cabinet. “The composition of the cabinet reflects backroom deals founded on pay for play,



Baptism of fire: President Chakwera's cabinet announcement was met with stinging criticism
(Gianluigi Guercia/AFP)

corruption and nepotism,” he said.

“The backlash represents a crisis of expectations... people are seeing configurations similar to those seen in the previous regime and so do not think that the cabinet as composed represents the change desired,” said Henry Chingaipe, a governance expert.

On Friday, the president gave a speech to respond to the concerns, saying that all appointments were made on merit alone.

Speaking directly to his new cabinet ministers, Chakwera said: “I want you to hear me and to hear me clearly... should you prove the sceptics right by being lazy, abusive, wasteful, arrogant, extravagant, divisive and corrupt, I will not hesitate to have you replaced.” ■



Decision time: President Alassane Ouattara and the ruling party have yet to decide who will run in the upcoming election (Photo: Issouf Sanogo/AFP)

Côte d'Ivoire's president chose a successor – who just died

Will Alassane Ouattara now risk running for a third term? Everything is possible, says his party.

Leanne de Bassompierre

The death of Côte d'Ivoire's Prime Minister Amadou Gon Coulibaly has left the ruling party without a presidential candidate – less than four months before elections. Speculation is rife that President Alassane Ouattara may end up seeking the third term he had earlier said he would not pursue.

Gon Coulibaly, 61, died on Wednesday after taking part in the weekly cabinet meeting. He arrived back in the country from France less than a week before, where he had been receiving treatment for a heart condition for the past two months.

He had travelled there regularly since

major surgery in 2012.

When he was evacuated on May 2, amid international border closures due to the coronavirus pandemic, the government said it was for a routine medical check-up. Days later, it was disclosed that he had had a stent inserted and needed several more weeks of rest in the French capital before returning home.

The “Lion of Korhogo”, as he was affectionately called, referring to the northern city from which he hailed and where he was one-time mayor, was Ouattara’s chosen successor. “I pay tribute to my younger brother, my son, Amadou Gon Coulibaly, who was my closest ally for 30 years,” the president said in a statement read out on national television.

Coulibaly had been receiving treatment for a heart condition before he died

“The death of Gon Coulibaly forces the RHDP [The Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace] to review its entire strategy built around Gon Coulibaly. The party must make tough choices and President Ouattara will return to the heart of the political game for this electoral battle,” said Ousmane Zina, a political analyst based at Alassane Ouattara University in Bouaké, the country’s second-biggest city. “We cannot say for sure he will be a candidate, but he will in any case be the pillar of the

RHDP,” he said.

Party leaders have not ruled out a third term, despite lingering doubts over the constitutionality thereof. “Everything is possible today,” Adama Bictogo, the RHDP executive director, told reporters at the party’s headquarters on Thursday, adding that party leaders would be meeting shortly to decide.

Eight days of national mourning were declared as of 10 July.

Rivals eye the nomination

Ouattara fell out with his main coalition partner, Henri Konan Bédié, over the issue of a third term in 2018, when he suggested that a new constitution adopted in 2016 reset the clocks – this would allow him to run again, if he wished. Bédié, 86, who supported Ouattara in elections in 2010 and again in 2015, announced his bid for the presidency for the opposition Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire, known by its French acronym, PDCI, last month. When Bédié pulled his party out of the ruling coalition, several key members decided to stay, including secretary general in the presidency Patrick Achi and Vice-President Daniel Kablan Duncan. Their senior positions in government could make them eligible presidential candidates, but their origins in the PDCI may disadvantage them, according to analysts.

While the October vote could pit the longstanding rivals against each other once again, quelling the presidential ambitions of those within the party’s ranks may be challenging – Defence

Minister Hamed Bakayoko, who was interim prime minister while Gon Coulibaly was on medical leave, being among them.

A Bakayoko candidacy would be appealing for many reasons, said Tochi Eni-Kalu, an analyst at Eurasia Group, in an emailed note. “A charismatic politician, he is popular among the party base and young Ivorians; Also, he has a proven electoral track record, having handily won a competitive mayoral race in Abobo, Côte d’Ivoire’s most populous municipality,” he said. “But party elites have long held reservations about his readiness for office – recent media reports alleging his involvement in drug trafficking will do little to alter these perceptions – and Ouattara’s decision to pick Coulibaly in the first place was partly informed by the latter’s technocratic reputation, something which Bakayoko lacks”.

Whoever does end up leading the RHDP ticket will also have to contend with exiled former national assembly speaker and ex-rebel leader Guillaume Soro, who announced his candidacy last year after falling out with Ouattara. Soro, 48, has since been convicted and sentenced in absentia to 20 years in jail for embezzlement of public funds and money laundering, and still faces a charge of endangering state security. He denies the allegations that he deems are politically motivated.

A nation on edge

Elections in the world’s top cocoa grower, that has seen some of the world’s highest

economic growth rates in recent years, are building up to be the tensest since Ouattara took office in 2011 following five months of post-electoral violence that left more than 3,000 people either missing or dead.

Whoever ends up leading the RHDP ticket will have to contend with ex-rebel leader Guillaume Soro who announced his candidacy last year

The 2011 violence was triggered by then-president Laurent Gbagbo’s refusal to concede defeat. Gbagbo was acquitted on charges of crimes against humanity in The Netherlands-based International Criminal Court in January last year but is awaiting the outcome of the prosecutor’s appeal of the acquittal. In May, restrictions on his conditional release were eased to allow him to travel to any country that’s prepared to receive him, but as of Wednesday, communications minister Sidi Touré said the Ivorian government had not received any requests for his return.

The RHDP is expected to announce its new candidate a week after Gon Coulibaly’s funeral, according to Bictogo, with the electoral commission deadline to submit candidates’ names set for September 1.

“At this stage I can’t tell you definitively who the candidate will be but rest assured that it will be a choice who unifies, not divides,” Bictogo said. ■



Read the roots: Sylvia Arthur not only believes in decolonising the content of her library but also the way in which the content is consumed (Photos: Ernest Ankomah and Efuah Bonney)

Welcome to the Library for Africa and the Diaspora

What do you do when you have too many books?
Start a library. **Theresa Mallinson**

When Sylvia Arthur was working in Brussels in 2011, she kept sending boxes of books to her mother's house in Kumasi, Ghana for safekeeping.

When she returned to Ghana in 2017, she decided to create a home for her book collection. She noticed an empty floor above a pharmacy her mother frequented; a day later, she signed a lease. And so the Library for Africa and the African Diaspora was born.

Arthur was set on the idea of a library rather than, say, a bookshop. "Every time I would visit my mom, I would see all these books just sitting there. I felt guilty about it. I thought: 'It's a waste when there are people

who could have access to these books?”

If access is one of the library's founding principles, cultural relevance is another. The lion's share of books are by authors of Africa and the diaspora — and the African writers are particularly popular with patrons.

“There is a real need and desire to feel connected to Africa through books, because obviously it's not so easy to travel within Africa, which is a shame,” Arthur says. “And so people who come to the library feel like they want to read books by their fellow Africans; they feel like they want to travel to those African countries through those books.”

Arthur is trying to change the perception that libraries are a resource only for people in formal education

Arthur is trying to change the perception that libraries are a resource only for people enrolled in formal education. Research from 2010 found that “a typical user of a public library in Ghana is likely to be a young single male from a middle-class background, aged between 16 and 30, currently in school”.

Arthur's library is working to attract a broader demographic. “We try to promote reading outside of academia completely. We play music. People are in conversation; as well as reading, they're discussing ideas. So they make the connection: they

see how books connect to ideas, and the outside world,” she says.

The word “decolonise” is much bandied-about these days; for Arthur, the concept of a decolonised library is simple. “We are a library that centres and focuses on the works of Africans and African-descended writers from across the diaspora,” she says.

She mentions visiting a chain bookstore in the United Kingdom: 90% of the books in its Middle East section were written by people from the Middle East; 100% of the books in its European section were written by Europeans. “The Africa section [was] the complete inverse. Ninety-nine percent of the books in the Africa section were written by non-Africans,” Arthur notes.

“That is not the reality of the situation that we live in,” she says. “So when you come into the Library of Africa and the African Diaspora, African writers are showcased, not just on the shelves, but around the library. Their works are displayed; their images are displayed.”

For the true bibliophile, it is possible to sleep amongst the books — Arthur has listed the library's three attached bedrooms on Airbnb. For now though, our Covid-19-infected world means most of us will have to content ourselves with visiting Ghana through the words of its writers. ■

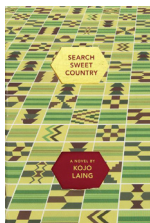
Four must-read books by Ghanaian writers

Sylvia Arthur, the founder of the Library of African and the African Diaspora in Accra, selects four works by her favourite Ghanaian authors

SEARCH SWEET COUNTRY

by B Kojo Laing

Written by a poet who brings a lyrical free-spiritedness to his prose, *Search Sweet Country* follows a cast of oddball characters in 1970s Accra.



1

2

THE PROPHET OF ZONGO STREET

by Mohammed Naseehu Ali

A delightful and quirky collection of short stories by an underrated writer who quietly captures the quotidian lives, hopes and aspirations of the characters that make up the Zongo; densely populated, urban areas in which society's looked-down-upon live complex but "normal" lives.



TWO THOUSAND SEASONS

by Ayi Kwei Armah

The Pan-African literature lover's staple. It tells the epic story of 2,000 seasons of precolonial African history, chronicling Arab and European incursion, and African complicity.



3

4

OF WOMEN AND FROGS

by Bisi Adjapon

Bisi Adjapon is a fresh new voice on the Ghanaian scene. Her writing is intimate yet universal, and tackles subjects that are considered taboo in Ghana, making her work all the more vital.



Ordinary lives in extraordinary times

The following story was drawn by Nash Kariuki, an illustrator and animator living in Nairobi, Kenya.

Kariuki says she is “drawn to create around the seemingly small and quiet tragedies the pandemic – and its mitigation measures – have caused in all of our lives; as well as the way human resilience has triumphed through our frustrations and fear”.



2020 started like any other year.



Maybe even a bit more special as we were starting a new decade.



Resolutions were made and others were to be maintained.
Things felt hopeful and exciting.



When the news on Covid-19 started filtering through,
I didn't pay much heed. Who did really?



It felt like the usual noise. In our lifetimes, plagues come,
went and fizzled out.



This one would do the same. It felt far away. We were busy.



But the news kept coming.
And getting worse. And
confusing. I got annoyed
by how I couldn't avoid it.

I tried muting it
on my social
media accounts.



We tried to carry
on like it wasn't
happening.



Slow chaos. A quiet disaster. On top of hearing stories of people dying and others risking their lives to save them, our own lives were unravelling.



Still, it didn't feel right to complain. After all, aren't you alive? And doing your part? Staying at home? Washing your hands?

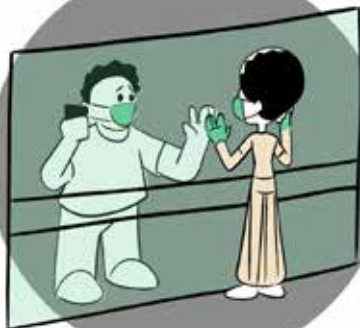
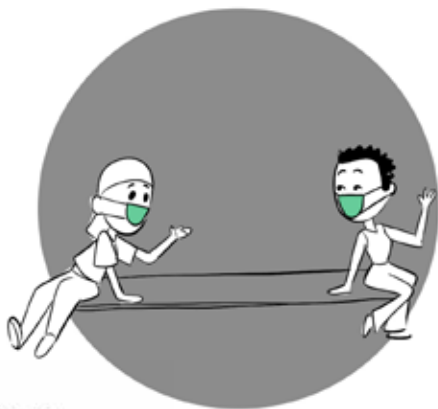


Even if your savings are steadily decreasing. And you haven't had a hug in weeks.

Now what? I guess, you start stitching things back together. Sort of. What else could you do? We laughed because at least you weren't the only one who felt uncertain or disappointed.



We comforted each other
as well. For all the loss
that was happening.



People can be really
nice when it counts.

People also adapt, even
when they felt they
couldn't. There is no
other way forward.



We're still moving. Humble, tired and resigned. Not as excited or as hopeful, but with adjusted expectations, not too bad most of the time.



It sucks but oh well.



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

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

Photo: Martin Bureau/AFP

- 1.** In which country can one find the pink lake known as Lake Retba or Lac Rose (pictured)?
- 2.** What is the capital of Madagascar?
- 3.** Sango is the official language of which central African country?
- 4.** Which European country occupied Eritrea, Ethiopia, Libya and Somaliland?
- 5.** True or false: Nigeria is the country with the highest rate of twins in the world.
- 6.** Which capital is the only city in the world with a national park or game reserve within its boundaries?
- 7.** Outside of Egypt, where can one find pyramids on the continent?
- 8.** The Ge'ez script is used in which countries?
- 9.** Who won the Africa Cup of Nations in 2010?
- 10.** Which country's currency is the lilangeni?
- 11.** Which African islands are known as the "perfumed islands"?
- 12.** Where is the musician Salif Keita from?

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 know my
Asmara from my
Antananarivo."

When the president met the Imam

Mali's future hangs in the balance.

Mucahid Durmaz

Protest leader: Imam Mahmoud Dicko addresses a huge crowd in Bamako on June 5 (Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP)

Last Saturday, arguably the two most powerful men in Mali greeted each other in a reception room somewhere in Bamako. The room was lined with leather sofas; as they spoke, the national flag hung on a pole behind them.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta is the president of Mali. His guest that day was Mahmoud Dicko: the influential imam who represents the greatest threat to Keïta's presidency.

After their meeting, as he left, Dicko addressed the president's cameraman. He sounded optimistic. "We talked about everything that concerns this crisis and the country in general. I think that with the will of everyone and of all the parties concerned, we will, inshallah, find the solution."

A president under fire

President Keïta – or IBK, as he is commonly known – faces no shortage of crises, or challenges to his authority.

There are the Islamist militants in the north, contained only by the presence of a massive international peacekeeping force. Their reach extends to central Mali, exacerbating intercommunal tensions that have already been sharpened by the impact of climate change on access to land and water. In the south, where more than 90% of the country lives, endemic poverty and food insecurity has fuelled widespread anger towards the government, with the Covid-19 pandemic worsening the situation.

Multiple corruption scandals have not helped any of these tensions,





Praying for change: Protesters observe Friday prayers during a rally in Bamako (Photo: Michele Cattani/AFP)

or instilled confidence in IBK's government, which has been in power since 2013.

Against this backdrop, Dicko has been able to channel public frustration towards the state with an approach that resonates widely: he advocates for moral values and good governance; calls for unity and divine assistance; and encourages reconciliation between ethnic and religious groups.

Nor is he afraid to criticise the president. "The head of state no longer has the physical and mental skills to run the country. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta must leave," Dicko said last month, according to *Le Monde Afrique*. This is not usually the kind of sentiment that gets you invited to meet the president, but IBK cannot afford to ignore Dicko.

Earlier this year, Dicko masterminded protests against Prime

Minister Soumeylou Maiga, in response to a devastating wave of violence that swept across central Mali last year. After 60,000 people packed into a Bamako stadium to demand his resignation, Maiga duly resigned in April – along with his entire cabinet.

Just two months later, Dicko launched the June 5 Movement – an anti-government umbrella group that brings together religious leaders, civil society groups and the coalition of opposition parties. With his support, the movement staged several protests in Bamako and other cities, mobilising tens of thousands of people. The movement has called for the dissolution of parliament, and some – although not Dicko personally – have demanded IBK's resignation.

This round of demonstrations were sparked by the contested results of

parliamentary elections in March and April, which were narrowly won by the ruling party.

The kingmaker

Dicko has been a major player in Mali's politics for many years.

Both his father and grandfather were well-known Muslim leaders, and he studied Islam in Mauritania and Saudi Arabia before returning to Mali in the 1980s. He rose through the ranks of various religious organisations – always outspoken on politics and governance, as well as religious issues – and was elected as head of the High Islamic Council in 2008.

No wonder the president is worried – and the meeting with Dicko did not appear to help

Despite his education there, Dicko has never embraced Saudi Arabia's ultra-conservative Wahhabist interpretation of Islam, and has never endorsed violent jihad, according to Africa Confidential. "Dicko insists that he does not regard an Islamic republic model as suitable for Mali and dismisses suggestions that he is a Wahhabist. But while he is fully accepting of a secular state structure and legal regime, he remains a firmly conservative advocate of religious values in family matters and personal behaviour," the magazine explained.

Infamously, in 2009, Dicko mobilised protests to defeat planned legislation that would have extended more rights to women. He is also vociferously opposed to homosexuality.

For Bakary Sambe, the director of Timbuktu Institute, the rise of Imam Dicko in the Malian politics "is the symbol of the failure of the political elite".

Alex Thurston, an academic at the University of Cincinnati who specialises in Islam and politics in West Africa, explained: "A lot of Malians feel that the top politicians are stale and have run out of ideas and solutions for Mali. Meanwhile there seems to be a lot of goodwill toward the leading clerics, who are seen as not quite as tainted by politics as Keïta or other longtime politicians".

No wonder the president is worried – and the meeting with Dicko did not appear to help.

Shortly afterwards, the opposition coalition released a statement in which it reaffirmed its "determination to obtain by legal and legitimate means the outright resignation" of the head of state.

If they get their way, then speculation turns to who would succeed IBK. For all his influence, Dicko is considered unlikely to put his own name forward – in this instance, the kingmaker may indeed be more powerful than the king. As he told *Jeune Afrique* in 2019: "I am not a politician, but I am a leader and I have opinions. If that is political, then I am political." ■

Federalism undermines Nigeria's Covid response

Fola Aina

Although most African states tend to give great power to the central government and the presidency, some countries – including Ethiopia, Kenya, and South Africa – feature federal or decentralised political systems. Creating an elected tier of regional leaders can help to bring power closer to the people but may also generate problematic tensions between the regional and national levels. In Nigeria, the country's federal system has significantly complicated the response to Covid-19.

Consider the actions of the Kano State Governor Abdullahi Umar Ganduje, who initially downplayed the significance of the virus, in part because he was keen to avoid having to implement an unpopular lockdown. Having won the 2019 elections under dubious circumstances, and gained a reputation for corruption, Ganduje can ill afford economic downturn.

The governor's position, however, was soon undermined by events, especially when his administration put a recent rise in deaths down to malaria, meningitis,

and hypertension. This led to a scuffle with the national government, which announced a two-week lockdown in the state in a bid to stop the spread of the disease. Ganduje responded by asking President Muhammadu Buhari for N15-billion (\$39-million) to help him fight coronavirus – a disease that he had recently claimed was not a problem. It is easy to see why fake news about the severity of the pandemic continues to flourish in this context.

Ganduje was not alone. The governor of Kogi state also claimed that it was wholly free from Covid-19. These experiences stand in strong contrast to states such as Ekiti and Kaduna and most notably Lagos, where authorities proactively provided regular updates on the number of cases and took firm steps to protect public health.

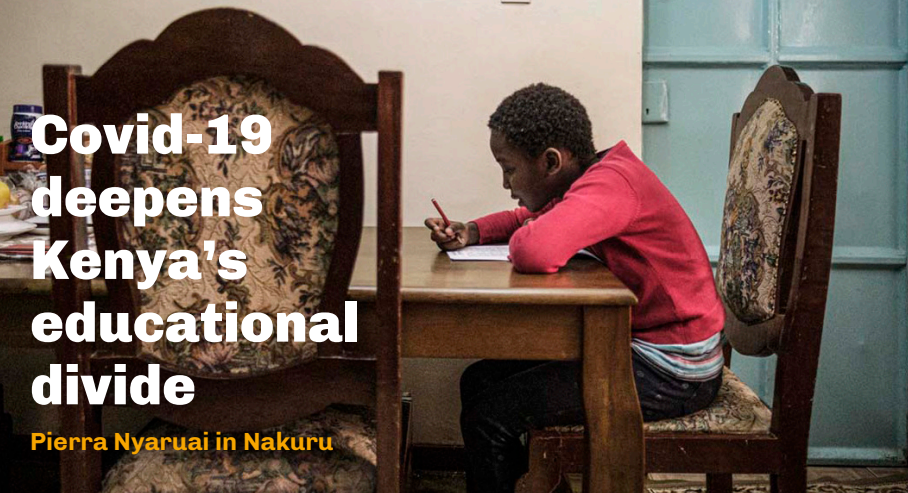
The main dividing line between these different outcomes is not whether governors come from the same party as the president, but whether they are willing to put aside their own political fortunes to be guided by the data. Moving forwards, the country's leaders must accept the new Covid-19 Data dashboard established by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and base their policies on fact rather than fiction. ■

Fola Aina is a doctoral fellow at the African Leadership Centre, King's College London. This analysis was produced in partnership with Democracy in Africa



Covid-19 deepens Kenya's educational divide

Pierra Nyaruai in Nakuru



Home schooling: Kenya's schools have been closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP)

Joyce Wanjiru is a single mother. She looks after her two sons, aged 15 and 10, and a seven-year-old daughter. She sells vegetables on the side of the highway that links Nakuru with Nyahururu, and earns just enough to feed and clothe her family.

In normal times, Kenya's system of free public education means that her kids go to school, and she can usually afford whatever school supplies they need.

But now things have changed, and Wanjiru is struggling to keep up.

On March 15, Kenya's government shut down the country's schools. 17-million learners were told to stay at home in an effort to contain the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Since school was suspended, I have to buy more food since they are home,

and pay for learning aid," Wanjiru told the *Mail & Guardian*. "I have a friend who's a teacher, so she sends me some exams they can revise with. I know it's not a curriculum, but it ensures they don't forget the basics of their classwork. They also teach each other. I'm not usually there to supervise but they show me the work done when I get home. They also help me with farmwork now that they are free some of the time, so that keeps them away from bad company."

Wanjiru dropped out of school after Standard 6, so she struggles to teach the schoolwork to her children, or to correct their work. At this stage, she just wants to make sure they keep reading – and don't forget what they have learned already.

The situation is very different for Lilian Madogi, who is a parent at a private school in Nakuru. With access

to computers and the internet, and able to afford a one-off fee of 3000 Kenyan shillings (\$30) her children are able to attend classes virtually via Zoom, Google Meet and Google Classroom. There are about 25 to 30 students in each virtual class. Madogi is a teacher herself, and is able to administer learning and accurately grade her children's work.

“Since school was suspended, I have to buy more food since they are home, and pay for learning aid.”

In the absence of physical schooling, Kenya's socioeconomic and geographical divides are having a disproportionate impact on education – and, as a result, are being replicated in the next generation.

For example, homes in urban areas are more likely to have access to technological aids like smartphones, laptops, and computers (whether in the home or in cyber cafes or libraries). Families in rural and lower-income areas, meanwhile, may struggle to access books and stationary.

The timing of the school shutdown has not helped the situation. With the onset of the rainy season, children at home in rural areas have been helping with land preparation and crop planting. In nomadic communities, young boys are likely to herd and tend to livestock rather than attend school and catch up with learning.

Girls are at even greater risk. Last month, Machakos County – one of 47 Kenyan counties – announced a huge increase in teen pregnancies, with more than 4,000 recorded between February and May. The age of consent in Kenya is 18 years. The county's children's officer, Salome Muthama, said that some of these teen pregnancies involved rape by a family member.

For some of these girls, this might mean the end of the educational road. Even if schools do return, they may never be able to sit for their final exams as they will be responsible for raising their own children.

Kenya has yet to announce when schools will reopen. It is still in the midst of the pandemic (as of July 10, Kenya had recorded 9,448 cases of Covid-19, including 181 deaths). The country's economy has been battered by the pandemic: pre-Covid growth projections of between 6% and 7% have been slashed to just 1.5% by the World Bank. This too will impact schoolgoers: as families suffer from job losses and lost income, so children may be forced into labour at a younger age.

Kenya's situation is far from unique. Unicef, the United Nations' Children's Agency, estimates that less than a quarter of Africa's schoolgoing population has internet access – making virtual learning almost impossible.

“A learning crisis already existed before Covid-19 hit. We are now looking at an even more divisive and deepening education crisis,” said Unicef's chief of education, Robert Jenkins. ■



The Big Picture

En pointe: Olamide Olawale, a student of the Leap of Dance Academy, performs a routine in Okelola Street in Ajangbadi, Lagos. The school was started by Daniel Ajala, who opened its doors in late 2017 after studying ballet online and in books. The academy aims to bring classical dance to children who otherwise would not encounter it. (Photo: Benson Ibeabuchi for AFP)

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