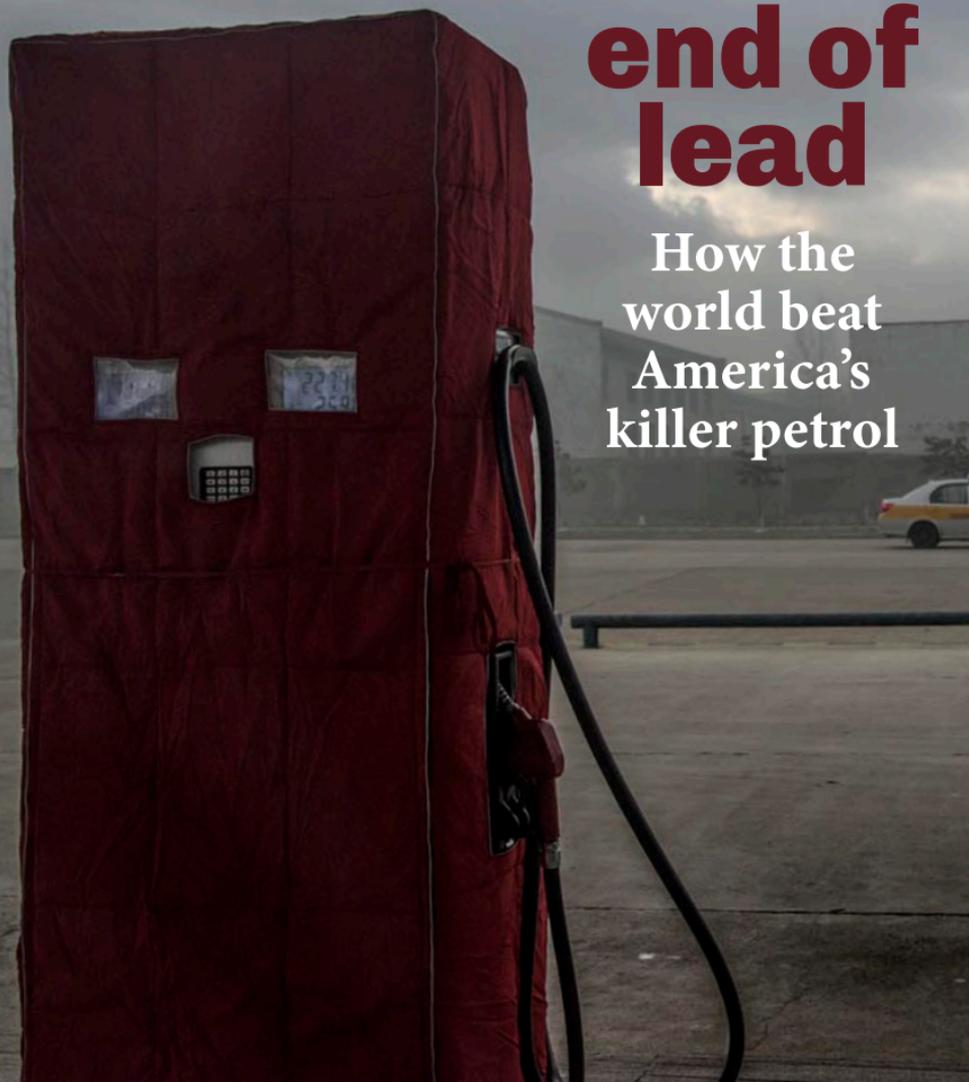


with Mail & Guardian

The Continent

The end of lead

How the
world beat
America's
killer petrol



Inside:

- **COVER:** They knew it killed people, but the American petrochemical industry rebranded lead petrol and sent it around the world. It's taken a century to get rid of it (p9)
- **What happened when The**

Continent's news editor tried to tweet in Nigeria? (p14)

- **To Shakespeare, or not to Shakespeare?** Schools in Malawi should think again (p21)
- **Review:** Does the *King of Boys* sequel live up to the hype? (p22)
- **Exclusive interview:** is Bobi Wine losing faith in democracy? (p24)



THE BORING ADMIN SECTION

Last week, we asked for your help on deciding whether to take an advertising deal from a major bank. There was a very clear winner. (p30)



MAIL & GUARDIAN
3.9.21

The week in numbers



1-billion

... the number of Sinovac Covid-19 vaccines that Egypt will produce a year.

SAUDI ARABIA

AFRICA

5

... distinct waves of migration to the Arabian Peninsula by ancient settlers from prehistoric Africa, according to a new study.

51

... medals won by African athletes at the Paralympics so far



44,000

... people missing across Africa, according to the Red Cross



50%

... of jabbed Kenyans have gone back for a second injection



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Photo:
Mauricio
Lima/ AFP

Why is Uganda cleaning up America's mess?

Dear Editor,

It's an open secret that the Afghan people were abandoned carelessly. The global community is still in deep shock about America's reckless withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. But Uganda's decision to host some refugees from Afghanistan is also shocking. African nations should leave Western countries to deal with their own problems. Yes, the situation in Afghanistan is dire, but why Africa? Yoweri Kaguta Museveni should think twice to avoid strange and awful setbacks in the very near future. It is not Africa's responsibility to keep Afghan refugees. America has messed up and should bear the consequences.

*Terrence Mwedzi,
South Africa*

Zuma made his bed. Now he must lie in it.

Dear Editor,

Former South African president Jacob Zuma is playing broke in the public gallery – meanwhile he gets his government benefits and his son is a billionaire. His supporters sabotaged the economy in his name and he has not even once tried to rectify their actions, and now he has the nerve to ask for donations. He must opt for government pro-bono lawyers like all South Africans who are unable to afford a lawyer. If he had not played delaying tactics he would not ask for donations. Let him dance to his own tune.

*Molefe Nkgodi,
Midrand, South Africa*



Would you like to respond to a story that appeared in *The Continent*? We welcome all feedback and critique – but please do remember to play nicely. Email us at letters@thecontinent.org. All submissions must be under 100 words and will be moderated by the editorial team.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Dummy behaviour

Ivorian TV presenter Yves De M'Bella sparked outrage and protests this week after asking a guest described as a “former rapist” to demonstrate how he attacked his victims with the aid of a dummy. De M'Bella, who hosts a primetime show on the private Nouvelle Chaîne Ivoirienne channel has been suspended for 30 days from all radio and television shows. A court also gave him a 12-month suspended sentence, fined him \$3,600 after convicting him of “condoning rape” and barred him from leaving Abidjan. He was also stripped of hosting duties at the Miss Ivory Coast beauty pageant this weekend.

OIL

Congo Republic leads oil cartel

The Republic of the Congo will succeed Angola in the rotating presidency of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries in 2022. In sub-Saharan Africa Congo is the third largest oil producer, behind Nigeria and Angola, producing an estimated 336,000 tonnes of crude oil every day. The country is trying to drive development across the energy value chain, having 10-trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 2.9-billion barrels of oil reserves.



Photo: Ashley Hamer/AFP

SOUTH SUDAN

A very Salva salvo

On Sunday, a coalition of activist groups reiterated their calls for the resignation of President Salva Kiir's government in South Sudan, citing corruption, failure to protect citizens and provide basic services to the population. The next day, the internet was down across the country (“technical issues”, according to officials), and security forces had been deployed on the streets of the capital. Kiir said those calling for protests “wish us ill”, and claimed “improving the wellbeing of our people is our priority”.

SOUTH AFRICA

250,000 deaths

South Africa passed the grim milestone of a quarter of a million excess deaths since 1 May 2020, when the Covid pandemic first hit the country. Still in its third wave, vaccinations have also picked up after northern hemisphere countries reduced their grip on supplies.

SOUTH AFRICA

No room at the inn

South Africa said this week it had declined to take in an unknown number of Afghan refugees who fled to Pakistan to escape Taliban rule because it already hosts “a substantial number” of refugees from elsewhere. “The South African government is unfortunately not in a position to accommodate such a request,” a foreign ministry statement said. According to reports, South Africa had been asked to take in 126 refugees who fled Afghanistan via Pakistan, and had been offered funding to provide for their upkeep for at least six months. South Africa is Africa’s most industrialised nation and is home to many from across



Refuge: Afghans arrive in the US from Kabul. Photo: Getty Images/AFP

the continent seeking refuge. But refugee applications often take a long time to be processed and there are occasional flare-ups of xenophobic violence targeting foreigners who are scapegoated both for crime and for rising levels of unemployment.

NIGERIA

Passports, please

In order to speed up vaccination rates, two southern states in Nigeria want to make public venues accessible only to those who have been vaccinated. “Beginning from the second week of September, [certain] places will only be accessed by persons who have proof of taking at least one dose of Covid-19 vaccination,” said Edo State’s governor. Other countries have begun requiring similar “vaccine passports”, but usually only once their vaccination rate has passed 50%. According to World Health Organisation data, only 0.7% of Nigerians are fully vaccinated.

SOUTH SUDAN

Room to breathe

South Sudan announced that it has begun producing oxygen following the installation of the country’s first oxygen plant at the Juba Teaching Hospital, courtesy of funding provided by the African Development Fund. The oxygen plant is part of South Sudan’s Covid-19 management programme as it prepares for future waves of the pandemic. “The installation of the oxygen plant will be a great boost to provide intensive care treatment to the critically ill Covid-19 patients,” said Dr Fabian Ndenzako, the WHO Representative for South Sudan, who implemented the programme.

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Hazmat, will travel: A laboratory worker in full protection gear transports a Covid-19 sample. Photo: Getty Images

HEALTH

Out with the old, in with the ‘Mu’

Two new Covid-19 variants have entered into circulation. South African scientists reported they were keeping an eye on variant C1.2, not yet given a Greek letter as it is not officially a variant of concern, but they noted that it contains more mutations away from the original Covid-19 strain than any other variant yet seen. However it is not yet known whether it is more infectious or leads to more severe disease than other variants, or whether it can circumvent vaccine immunity. The other new variant – named “Mu” by the WHO – is of more concern. Mainly found in Colombia so far, preliminary evidence suggests it may be able to evade Covid-19 antibodies.

HEALTH

Ebola case proves to be a false alarm

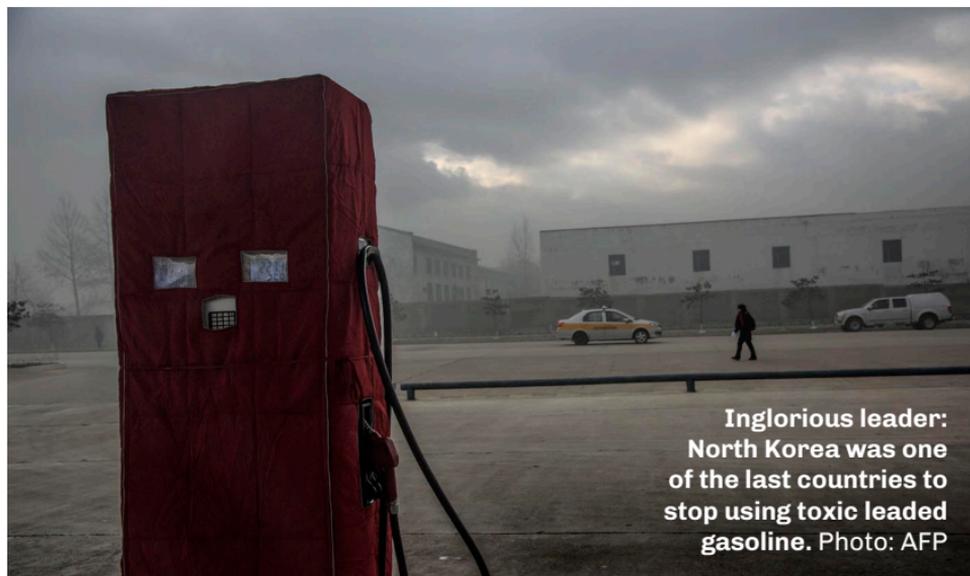
A couple of weeks after it was reported that a Guinean woman with Ebola had travelled to Côte d’Ivoire, triggering an immediate emergency response from the country’s healthcare sector, it has been confirmed by the World Health Organisation that the case was in fact a false positive. “More than 140 contacts have been listed in both countries. No other people have shown symptoms of the disease, nor have they tested positive for Ebola,” the organisation noted. Interventions in the country have now been downgraded.

TANZANIA

Freeman Mbowe’s freedom denied

The leader of Chadema, Tanzania’s lead opposition party, appeared in the country’s high court this week to face charges of terrorism. Chadema believes the arrests and charges are politically motivated to stop dissent. Freeman Mbowe has accused the police of torturing him in custody to force him to make a statement. Mbowe has been in jail since July 21 and his defence team says he was held without charge for five days, before being charged without a lawyer present.

World



Inglorious leader:
North Korea was one
of the last countries to
stop using toxic leaded
gasoline. Photo: AFP

A century of murder

The US petrochemical industry created leaded petrol. They knew it was deadly. So they rebranded it and sold it to the world.

Sipho Kings

The inventor of leaded petrol got so sick from working with it that he moved to Florida to recuperate. Five workers at the first factory died. Thirty five more were admitted to hospital. That's out of a workforce of 49. But this was the 1920s in the United States, when you could buy

radioactive uranium health supplements over the counter. Besides, leaded petrol solved a critical problem, giving cars more oomph so people would love them and buy them. So the industry rebranded, and called their dangerous new product "ethyl gasoline" instead of leaded gasoline. It ran a massive advertising campaign. The inventor sat in front of journalists and

poured the fuel over his hands, inhaling the toxic fumes for a whole minute before proclaiming that he could do this every day for a year and be fine.

It worked. Leaded petrol became the global standard, beating out cleaner but less profitable variants. US petrochemical companies got fabulously wealthy as a result, and by 2011, lead pollution was killing 1.2-million people a year.

It took another half a century after its rebranding before serious questions were asked again about the pollution from leaded petrol. The US's Environmental Protection Agency said petrol was driving the accumulation of lead in the country's soil and natural water sources, in turn affecting the growth and reproductive abilities of plants and animals, and rewiring the brains of vertebrates.

In humans, the lead deposited in the environment by leaded petrol arrives through your lungs and digestive system, then travels through your blood vessels before accumulating in your bones. It attacks the nervous, immune and cardiovascular systems, and reduces kidney function, reproductive ability and mental development.

In short, leaded petrol tears us down from the inside. Its longest-lasting societal effect is in children, who are particularly sensitive to lead poisoning. It drives learning problems and lowers IQ. Recent research indicates that in New York, where a reduction in violent crime is often attributed to more invasive policing, there was also a strong correlation between reduced crime and the reduction of lead in petrol in the 1970s.



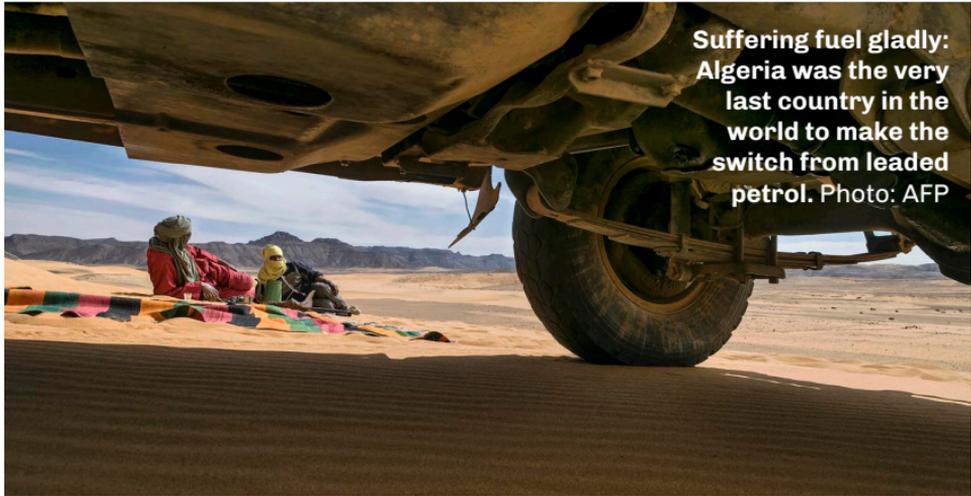
On the move: A gridlocked and polluted Cairo. Solving emissions means solving transport, and Egypt is already on the case. Photo: Khaled Desouki / AFP

That was when the petrochemical and motoring industries were forced to start tackling pollution, prompted by another typically American scandal: the motoring industry was found guilty of colluding to suppress the development of catalytic converters, which reduce pollution but increase manufacturing costs.

Phasing out lead

It took until the 2000s for global action on lead petrol. In 2001, 25 countries from sub-Saharan Africa signed up to the Dakar Declaration to eliminate lead by 2005. In 2002, the Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles was launched. At this point more than 80 countries still allowed leaded petrol to be sold at the pump. Research done that decade, by the University of California, showed that getting rid of lead would save 1.2-million lives globally – every single year. It would also save \$2.4-trillion a year in lost GDP, productivity and healthcare.

For a while Algeria, Afghanistan,



Myanmar and North Korea were the last remaining hold-outs – because the switch is expensive, after all – but eventually Algeria was the only nation in the world still using leaded fuel. Until now.

This week, the UN announced Algeria had finally given in. The world is now “officially” free from mass-produced leaded petrol and its health risks.

The climate angle

Celebrating, UN secretary general António Guterres released a video asking countries to use the phasing out of leaded petrol as a “blueprint” for phasing out fossil fuels.

Which takes us back to the inventor of leaded petrol. Thomas Midgley Jr went on to create CFCs, a family of chemicals that made fridges work better. But CFCs were created in such vast quantities that they started eating away at the ozone layer, the thin band of atmospheric gas around this planet that keeps out harmful radiation from the sun and allows life to exist.

Things got so bad that in 1987 countries signed up to get rid of nearly all CFCs: the Montreal Protocol was the first UN treaty ratified by every country on Earth.

It has been wildly successful at eliminating CFCs. And it remains the most successful treaty in history when it comes to reducing carbon emissions, though that wasn’t its initial objective.

Now it’s time to do it again: the world meets in Scotland next month, at COP26, to try make the Paris Agreement more ambitious by getting countries to work together to keep global heating below 2°C.

In its mega climate report last month, the UN warned that the world is on track for around 2.7°C of heating. That’s nearly double what African countries have argued would be catastrophic.

Which underlines Guterres’s point. Humanity came together to eliminate leaded petrol and CFCs.

So the world’s nations *can* work together to tackle seemingly impossible problems, for the benefit of everyone. ■

Hurricane Ida was an extreme weather event that caused death and devastation in the United States this week. The response of fossil fuel giant ExxonMobil did not tell the whole story.

ACTUAL STATEMENT

In the wake of Hurricane Ida,
our thoughts and prayers are with our
Gulf Coast friends and neighbors in
Louisiana.

Please stay safe and continue to look out
for each other as you are able.

#LouisianaStrong

ExxonMobil

EDITED VERSION

In the wake of Hurricane Ida,
*We remind you that we knew about global heating.
But did everything we could to stop action.
Things are worse for our neighbors as a result.
They are worse for everyone.*

*Try to survive while we keep making things worse.
Our profits depend on it.*

#WeFixedIt

ExxonMobil

Zambia

Hichilema's nasty surprise

No wonder Lungu was so happy to hand over power

Zambia's new president, Hakainde Hichilema, has not been wasting any time. Sworn in just last week, he has already sacked the country's police and military chiefs as part of his promised crackdown on the security services which, he said, had become heavy-handed and "thuggish" under his predecessor. (An assessment echoed by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.)

He has also appointed a new finance minister in the form of Situmbeko Musokotwane, a respected economist who has held the post before, from 2008 to 2011. His appointment reflects the urgency of Zambia's economic crisis.

Now that the new president has had a chance to look closely at the country's books, he says the situation is even more dire than he had feared. "I don't want to pre-empt things but what we are picking is horrifying," the president told the BBC in an interview.

The core issue is the country's foreign debt, which was previously thought to stand at a staggering \$12.7-billion.

But Hichilema said the "hole is much

bigger than we expected".

Finance minister Musokotwane said that the country plans to approach the International Monetary Fund for a bailout, and will seek to negotiate new terms with creditors. "The answer is to talk to the people we owe money so that we can pay at a slower pace stretched over a longer period," he said.

Now that the new president has had a chance to look closely at the country's books, he says the situation is 'horrifying'. The core issue is the country's foreign debt, which Hichilema said 'is much bigger than expected'.

Zambia's acknowledged debt is divided between Eurobonds (\$3-billion), multilateral lending agencies (\$2.1-billion), commercial banks (\$2.9-billion) and bilateral debt (\$3.5-billion).

About a quarter of it is owed to Chinese state or commercial entities, in deals that come with strict secrecy clauses – making it even more difficult for the new government to be transparent about its financial position, and what can be done to fix things. ■

Nigeria

No Twitter? No problem.

Like most Nigerian social media users, I've been around the block

Aanu Adeoye in Lagos

When I landed last Friday night at the Murtala Muhammed International Airport in Lagos, I was greeted by the usual: hot air and mild chaos. I texted my friends on WhatsApp to say I had arrived, and checked my emails. Then, like any self-respecting millennial journalist, I opened Twitter.

Hmm. Tweets were not loading.

I refreshed a few times and checked to be sure I had enough mobile data.

And then I remembered: Oh yes, Twitter is banned in Nigeria. Despite writing the breaking news story for *The Continent* on the June night the ban was announced, it had slipped my mind as I returned home.

So, like most Nigerians on Twitter, I simply turned on my VPN and carried on tweeting. Justice Minister Abubakar Malami initially threatened to prosecute anyone who bypassed the ban, but later walked back his comments. So although – 90 days later – Twitter is still banned in

Nigeria, it is not difficult to access if you know what you're doing.

Two weeks ago Information Minister Lai Mohammed hinted that the ban could soon be lifted as talks between the government and the American social media giant continue.

Twitter's original offence was that it deleted a tweet from President Muhammadu Buhari threatening to punish pro-Biafra groups blamed for escalating violence in the southeast. Twitter said that it had violated its "abusive behaviour" policy.

The American company's original offence was that it deleted a tweet from President Muhammadu Buhari threatening to punish pro-Biafra groups blamed for escalating violence in the southeast.

But it is understood that Nigeria also wants Twitter to open a local office in the country as part of its demands.

But, in what has widely been seen as a snub to Nigeria, where a thriving tech ecosystem has taken root, the company has already chosen Accra, the capital of Ghana, as its designated office in Africa.



Uganda

Afghan evacuees welcomed in Kampala

But not everyone thinks it's a good idea.

Andrew Arinaitwe in Kampala

On Wednesday morning last week, a convoy of three Nissan Coaster minibuses drove from Entebbe Airport to the nearby Imperial Resort hotel. The convoy was flanked by two police pickups, and the policemen in the back were carrying AK-47s.

Inside the minibuses were 51 citizens of Afghanistan who had just been evacuated from Kabul Airport, after the Taliban seized control of the country. They were among more than 100,000 people who were airlifted out in a hurry over the last week, amid fears that the Taliban would seek revenge against anyone who had worked in any capacity with the United States-led occupying force, which pulled out entirely on August 31.

The new arrivals were not refugees, said the Ugandan government, and would only remain in Uganda temporarily – until

proper documentation was prepared by the US government to allow them to go to America. Under the agreement with the US, as many as 2,000 Afghans could be processed through Uganda.

“They are of different categories, some of them are VIPS, the country’s ministers, members of parliament, government leaders,” information minister Chris Baryomunsi told journalists.

The Continent’s request to interview the evacuees was denied. “[They] deserve as much privacy to cope and heal from what they have gone through,” said Julius Mucunguzi, the prime minister’s head of communications. One journalist who did manage to secure an interview, the Deutsche Presse-Agentur’s Henry Waswa, was arrested and charged with trespassing (he was later released).

Although lauded abroad, Uganda’s decision to welcome the Afghan evacuees has proved to be controversial at home – especially because an unspecified number of Ugandan nationals are in Afghanistan and unable to return home. Some of the Ugandans stranded there worked as dog handlers for US security contractors.

Uganda already hosts more than 1.5-million refugees, more than any other country in Africa.

Neighbouring Rwanda has also opened its doors to Afghans in distress, welcoming the entire staff and student body of a Kabul-based girls boarding school. ■



A night at Africa's highest city bar

Somewhere up there in the clouds above the continent's wealthiest square mile floats Alto234

Refiloe Seiboko in Johannesburg

There aren't many of things that will get me out of the house under the current circumstances. A bar? No. Going out into the city? No. Bottles of bubbles? Still no.

But all of these things together was a temptation that proved impossible to resist: Africa's highest urban bar – perched on the very top of Africa's tallest

skyscraper – is opening this weekend, and a few select members of the public were invited for a sneak peek (aka *moi*). After summiting 234 metres to the 57th floor of The Leonardo in Sandton, Johannesburg, we were greeted with a stream of Moët & Chandon and views of the thriving metropolis that is Johannesburg, from the very centre of what is Africa's richest square mile: this is Alto 234.

(All Covid-19 protocols observed: Several sanitising stations were in operation, waitrons were masked and vaccinated, and we were out in the open air, so ventilation proved no obstacle.)

“Alto” means “height” in Latin. An apt name, then, for a venue that once vied for the title of “tallest building in Africa”. (Congratulations to Djamaa el Djazaïr – the Great Mosque of Algiers.) So now what was once a big hole in the ground with ponds frequented by Egyptian geese

(“I’m sure they’ll find somewhere else to live,” an executive noted in his speech) is out to stake a claim as the rooftop watering hole of choice for the upwardly mobile.

The upmarket location is punctuated by plush decor and swanky designs that complement the breathtaking 360° views of the City of Gold. It’s well thought-out and does everything to meet the standard that the natural beauty of the city brings.

As noted by the venue’s curators, exposed concrete and steel are a nod to the city’s grittiness, Jo’burg’s greenery and sunsets are signalled by pops of green and orange, and the black and brass metals acknowledge the city’s mining heritage.

Sophisticated taste buds will be tantalised by tapas which feature figs and truffle, bone marrow brioche and tasty seabass, which is a must-try in my opinion. If nothing else, the Moët & Chandon Mini Machine – a literal champagne vending machine – makes the venue unique. It’s an exclusive feature to Alto234. “The most innovative champagne service in Africa”, they’re calling it, and it’s difficult to argue against that, being that it’s the only one on the continent. (There are only 12 in the world and this one was delivered by helicopter, for goodness sake.)

It’s everything you would want out of an extravagant excursion to a Sandton rooftop. And in a city that has tried to brand itself as “a world-class African city” for years, it certainly seems like a step in the right direction to open a bar of this ilk – although, given the eye-watering drinks prices, few of this city’s residents will be able to sample its luxuries.

“We’re giving the consumer not only



Top of the world: It may be out of reach for most of us, but the scandalously rich really seem keen on this kind of thing.

golden sunsets but a golden experience,” Moët Hennessy portfolio manager Patrick John Leslie told *The Continent*.

“There’s more money within a mile of where we are right now on this rooftop than the majority of close to 50 countries on the African continent. It really is the pulse of the African economy.”

A bold statement if ever I’ve heard one.

If you’ve got \$100 to spare (entrance, a couple of glasses, a tapa or two and parking), it’ll quench your thirst for opulence and give you everything needed for an Instagram-worthy moment. ■

South Africa

Dying to tell the truth

Whistleblower shot outside Johannesburg home

Kiri Rupiah

Just after 8am on 23 August, shortly after dropping her child off at school, Babita Deokaran was shot outside her home in Mondeor, south of Johannesburg in South Africa. The killers – who reportedly stalked her for a month before the shooting – had waited for her to stop in front of her home, before firing several shots into her car. She died in hospital.

As more details about the killing emerged it became clear this was no ordinary act of criminality.

Deokaran, a senior civil servant, was one of several witnesses in a Special Investigating Unit (SIU) probe linking prominent political figures and business people to Covid-19 personal protective equipment corruption at the province's health department. The unit is the country's primary tool for investigating grand theft and corruption.

According to the province's premier, David Makhura, information provided by Deokaran had led to dismissals and

legal processes being initiated to recover public funds from businesses and officials involved in corruption.

Makhura himself may be liable for more than R42.8-million in Covid-19 procurement corruption because he allegedly failed to prevent officials of the Gauteng provincial government from acting unlawfully in awarding contracts.

Charges of murder, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder and the illegal possession of a firearm and ammunition have been brought against six men, and their bail hearing is scheduled for 13 September.

Deokaran, a senior civil servant, was one of several witnesses in a Special Investigating Unit probe.

A number of key prosecutions and inquiries in South Africa have been made possible by whistleblowers, but the consequences they face for speaking out are, increasingly, fatal.

Civil society groups are urging Cyril Ramaphosa to take the protection of whistleblowers seriously, and work with law enforcement to ensure their safety.

He has staked his presidency on rooting out corruption, but if people are literally dying to tell the truth, he may find that the cost of cleaning up the country is too high a price to pay. ■

Blow the whistle, risk retaliation?

The recent murder of a South African witness in the investigation into corrupt deals in the Gauteng health department sends a chilling message.

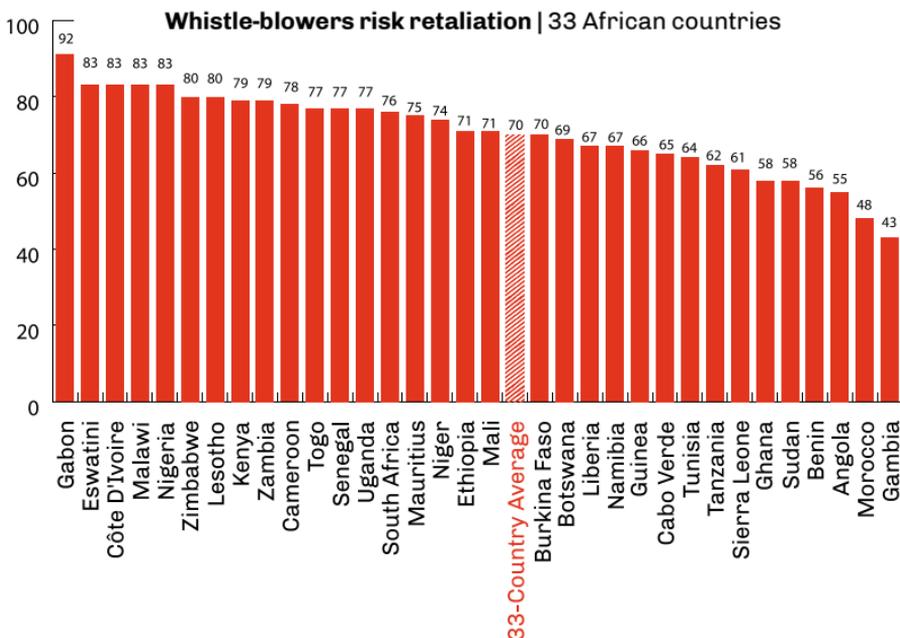
And would-be whistle-blowers get it.

On average across 33 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed between late 2019 and mid-2021, seven in 10 respondents (70%) say people risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption to the authorities. Only one in four citizens (27%) think they can safely report corruption. In Gabon, it's

just one in 10 (10%).

Fear of retaliation is the majority view in 31 of the 33 surveyed countries. The only exceptions are the Gambia and Morocco, where half (49% and 51%, respectively) say they can report wrongdoing without fear.

Considering that a majority (58%) of Africans say the level of corruption in their country increased last year (vs just 22% who say it decreased), ensuring that potential whistle-blowers know they're safe might be a strategy worth pursuing.



Source: Afrobarometer, a non-partisan African research network that conducts nationally representative surveys on democracy, governance, and quality of life. Face-to-face interviews with 1,200-2,400 people in each country yield results with a margin of error of +/-2 to 3 percentage points.

THE QUIZ

0-4

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

5-7

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

8-10

"Knowledge gives you power. Wisdom helps you give it back."



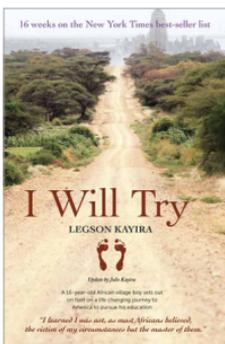
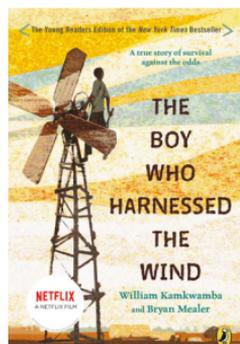
Photo: USGS/
NASA Landsat
data/Orbital
Horizon Gallo
Images/Getty
Images

- 1_ The Chagos Islands (pictured) are dependencies of which country?
- 2_ Which country refused Afghan refugees this week?
- 3_ Which West African country has banned Twitter?
- 4_ What is the nickname of Ghana's national men's football team?
- 5_ Which former ruler is regarded as God by Rastafarians?
- 6_ Grace Mugabe is the widow of which former president?
- 7_ "Jambo" is a greeting in which language?
- 8_ Salva Kiir is the president of Sudan. True or false?
- 9_ True or false: Algeria is part of sub-Saharan Africa.
- 10_ Boiled, pounded cassava, plantains or yams make what starchy food?

HOW DID I DO?

WhatsApp 'ANSWERS' to +27 73 805 6068 and we'll send the answers to you!

Would you like to send us some quiz questions or even curate your own quiz? Let us know at TheContinent@mg.co.za



Enough with the Shakespeare

There should be more local authors on Malawi's school curriculum

Jack McBrams

The plays of William Shakespeare, along with other western classics, are the foundation of Malawi's secondary school English curriculum. While there is no question that Shakespeare was a literary genius, I wonder how relevant his words are to learners across the country – and, for that matter, across the African continent.

About 85% of Malawi's population is

based in rural areas. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, according to the World Bank. So just how relevant is the tragic story of two teenage lovebirds in “fair Verona”, as depicted in Romeo and Juliet? Or the mental health and succession battles of Hamlet's obscure Danish prince?

The reliance on Western literature does not provide any relatable life lessons for learners in Malawi, or even Africa at large. Instead, the curriculum should champion the world-class literature produced by Malawian authors.

Take, for example, William Kamkwamba's memoir *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, which is now also a Netflix movie. This is a story of a rural boy who, against overwhelming odds, builds a windmill that electrifies his village and saves his family from hunger.

Or *I Will Try*, in which Legson Kayira recounts how, in 1958, he walked the length of the continent – from Malawi to Egypt – with the dream of crossing over to America in pursuit of a university education.

Both are *New York Times* bestsellers. Both are stories that Malawian learners can directly relate to, and can inspire them to want to be more and to achieve more with their lives. ■

Jack McBrams is a Malawian journalist



Does Shakespeare leave you shook? What books should be on your national curriculum, and why? Tell us at letters@thecontinent.org



King of Boys was a smash hit. Does the sequel do it justice?

Kemi Adetiba's Netflix miniseries is certainly stylish – but it's missing the panache of the original

Wilfred Okiche

Kemi Adetiba's surprise 2017 box office mega-hit *King of Boys* is back. After the film's runaway success, Netflix commissioned a sequel: a seven-part limited series, the streamer's first from Nigeria. The small screen works as a more appropriate fit both for Adetiba's notable propensity to embrace soapy dramatic excess and for the sheer breadth of the story she is telling. The original film had a staggering 169-minute runtime.

The film was a treatise on the

corruption of absolute power as told through the rise and fall of the protagonist, the instantly iconic Eniola Salami. The charismatic crime boss, played with manic glee by Sola Sobowale, has since become a fan favourite.

The Return of the King picks up five years after the events of the original. Salami, who fled the country to avoid prosecution for her crimes, returns to Nigeria as a free citizen. The first thing she does upon arrival is announce she is running for governor in Lagos's upcoming election. Her political ambition attracts



Iconic: Sola Sobowale returns as crime boss Eniola Salami

more dangerous enemies even as Salami faces the uphill task of reclaiming leadership of the underworld organisation she used to lead.

She also finds herself alone, following the tragic loss of her children. She is then forced to face herself, perhaps for the first time in her life. The contradictions and hypocrisies that Salami finds within are filtered through the instincts of her younger self, who also functions as her explosive id. Alas, the actress (Toni Tones) who plays this role hams it up so recklessly that it is drained of any proper impact. Elsewhere, the other actors do not fare much better, doing what they can with paper-thin roles.

For Adetiba and her team, finding the appropriate medium for the project was one thing, knowing what to do with it is quite another. *The Return of the King* is occasionally visually interesting, with flashes of excitement erupting at intervals as it pays homage to the storytelling gusto of popular Nollywood films of the nineties. However, while the film at least had Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* trilogy as a guiding text, the Netflix series sets off on its own adventure and struggles to spark the creative urgency needed to

propel it across seven hours.

Adetiba repeatedly falls into old patterns, rehashing a lot of what worked the first time. The pressure to deliver hangs over the project and she chooses "bigger" every time she is faced with a creative decision. Bigger cast, bigger performances, bigger costumes, longer scenes, bigger plot twists and plenty of fan service.

But bigger doesn't always translate to better and while *The Return of the King* delivers a thrilling climax that dials up the twists and the gore, the entire series feels slight, despite being heavy on plot. Instead of merely dialling up the sound and the fury, *The Return of the King* might have benefited from a deeper contextualising of the screenplay and more commitment to basic research.

The challenges start from the writing and extend to the heavy-handed approach that Adetiba takes to the material, consistently lengthening with superfluous reams of dialogue, scenes that could easily be established with a look here, or subtext there. Adetiba retains sole screenplay credit, but it is clear dramaturgy isn't her strong suit.

The nexus between crime and politics was already well established with the original *King of Boys*. The Netflix series updates the religious angle while retreading familiar arguments, all the while fully embracing nihilism.

But all is fair, it seems: in love, in war and on Netflix's small screen. ■

King of Boys: The Return of the King is now streaming on Netflix.

Bobi Wine's crisis of confidence

**Up against an expert
autocrat, the Ugandan
opposition leader is not
sure that the next election
will be any fairer than
the last – no matter how
popular he may really be**

Simon Allison in Johannesburg

Upon *The Continent's* first mention of President Yoweri Museveni, Bobi Wine interrupts. "For clarity," he says, leaning forward in his chair. "I won. Only I wasn't announced."

It has been nearly nine months since Yoweri Museveni was declared the winner of the Ugandan presidential election, and Bobi Wine – real name Ssentamu Robert Kyagulanyi – is still angry. The 39-year-old opposition leader believes the election was stolen from him, and he is not alone: the United States and the United Nations, among others, have raised serious concerns about the freedom and the fairness of the vote.

Refusing to legitimise this alleged electoral fraud, Bobi Wine pointedly refers to "General" Museveni throughout his interview with *The Continent* in

Johannesburg. He is in South Africa at the invitation of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, a German organisation that promotes liberal politics, and is speaking from their offices. The foundation also has links to several other opposition parties in Africa, including the Democratic Alliance in South Africa.

Shortly after Museveni was named president yet again, in January, more than 400 riot police descended on Bobi Wine's Kampala residence. Hundreds of his friends, relatives, colleagues, party members and supporters were arrested by security forces. Some were tortured in detention, some turned up dead, and others have yet to be accounted for.

The ferocity of the state's response to Bobi Wine's People Power movement is an indication of its effectiveness: for perhaps the first time in his 36-year-rule, Museveni was genuinely scared. Bobi Wine was able to tap into a deep well of disillusionment and resentment, particularly among Uganda's youth, who make up such a large proportion of the country's demographics.

His obvious charisma and his roots in Kampala's slums gave him instant legitimacy; his first career, as one of Uganda's most popular musicians, meant that he was already a household name.

But is that enough? Will it ever be enough in Uganda? When pressed, Bobi Wine admits that, in those dark days in January, while under house arrest, he started to have doubts. "I was very sceptical, to be honest. I was sceptical



I won: Nine months on from the election he insists was stolen by Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, Bobi Wine's faith remains in the power of the people.

Photo: *The Continent*

about the ability to change things, to change power, democratically.”

The recent election in Zambia has restored some of his faith in the democratic process. In his sixth campaign, Hakainde Hichilema unseated the increasingly autocratic Edgar Lungu in the presidential election, amassing such a decisive majority that the vote proved impossible to rig.

Hakainde's win is a “ray of hope”, but Bobi Wine's doubts have not been entirely banished. The Ugandan context is very different. Unlike Lungu, Museveni is one of the continent's most accomplished

autocrats. Such is his control over the institutions of state that Bobi Wine does not believe that elections in five or even 10 years time will deliver a different outcome.

So what next? Only people can deliver real change, he says – but he is coy on what exactly this change looks like, except to note that his People Power movement is bigger than the political party that he leads: The party exists to contest in democratic processes, while the movement is designed to bring an end to the regime.

“The movement is a liberation

movement that pushes for the end of dictatorship, even before the end of the next election cycle,” he explains. “The people shouldn’t leave options for General Museveni just like they didn’t leave options for Idi Amin, just like the people of Sudan didn’t leave options for Omar al-Bashir. The people must take charge of their own destiny.”

Museveni is one of the continent’s most accomplished autocrats. Such is his control over the institutions of state that Bobi Wine does not believe that elections in five or even 10 years time will deliver a different outcome.

Idi Amin was ousted in 1979 after an army mutiny, amid widespread dissatisfaction with his brutal rule. Bashir was ousted in 2019 in a revolution.

If Museveni’s regime is to be swept aside, Bobi Wine will have to maintain and grow the momentum that he carried into the January election.

This is easier said than done, of course, and outside of Uganda the news agenda has already moved on.

With the exception of a reporter from *The Continent*, not a single journalist turned up to the press conference he was supposed to address in South Africa on Thursday (although this could also be a symptom of the insularity of most South African media houses).

And, despite their protestations about

the conduct of the vote, the international community has continued to engage – and finance – the Museveni regime.

Regional and continental bodies like the East African Community and the African Union are little more than presidents’ clubs, says Bobi Wine, while international organisations and Uganda’s “development partners” – countries like the United States and United Kingdom, and the European Union – are little better.

The international community’s approach is rooted in racism, Bobi Wine argues – no European president would be allowed to get away with treating their people the way that Museveni treats Ugandans. “Why is the standard of human rights so low in Uganda? That is racism. The lives of the people of Uganda are as valuable as the lives of citizens of the rest of the world. I want them to know that we feel the hypocrisy, and it shouldn’t be like that in 2021.”

Despite the formidable forces ranged against him, Bobi Wine says that he has no intention of giving up the fight. When he and his wife Barbara Kyagulanyi were younger, they pledged to work as hard as possible in their youth so that they could retire aged 35 and really enjoy their lives. That milestone has come and gone. “She sees me now, scratching another explosive endeavour, and she’s like, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ But at the end of the day she realises this is not just about me but about the entire country. So she embraces this.”

Interview over, Bobi Wine walks away with the exaggerated swagger of the pop star that he is. Retirement is no longer on the agenda. Revolution might be. ■

The 'bandits' driving insecurity in Nigeria

Idris Mohammed

The combination of instability and criminality is having a dramatic effect on the lives of people in Nigeria. It is estimated that in the past year over 70,000 civilians from north-west Nigeria have fled their communities to find refuge in the Niger Republic.

Much of this has been driven by motorcycle-riding armed groups known as "bandits".

Conceptualising these groups is complicated. They are not religiously and ideologically motivated like Islamic State of West Africa Province, the radical Islamic terrorist organisation. They also lack a strong and centralised leadership or international affiliation. Instead, their main motivation appears to be financial and their modus operandi is opportunist.

In other words, "bandits" look to boost their income by extracting ransoms from the victims of kidnapping, as well as cattle rustling and "tax collection" – extortion – from local communities. A classic bandit extortion strategy is to set homes and grain stores on fire as a way to intimidate individuals into paying up. Early in 2019,

the former governor of Zamfara state, Abdulaziz Yari, reportedly said that nearly 500 villages and 13,000 hectares of land had been destroyed, and 2,835 people killed, in just seven years.

Banditry has also disrupted the lives of local traders, who, fearing attacks and abduction, feel compelled to remain indoors. On May 26, for example, an armed group blocked the road, stopping local cattle traders heading to the Garin Gadi weekly market in Sokoto state and robbed them of money and goods worth around ₦12,000,000 (almost \$30,000).

The economic impact of these processes has been dramatic: The Consumer Price Index report for June 2021 records that month on month food inflation skyrocketed to 21.83%. In the absence of an effective state response, Nigerian citizens are being left to fend for themselves.

This increases the risk that bandit attacks will spark fresh cycles of violence. If something is not done urgently to restore law and order to these regions, north-west Nigeria will reach the point of no return. ■



Idris Mohammed is a journalist and researcher on extreme terror and violent extremism in Nigeria. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa

Game on: Africa comes off the bench



Continental Drift

Samira Sawlani

Sometimes I ask myself, is there anything more quintessentially African than English Premier League football? And then I answer myself: Yes. Quite a lot, obviously. Afrobeats. Jollof rice. Post-independence flirtations with totalitarianism. But this is only a technical distinction, and in fact claiming a stake in English football is an ancient and holy African tradition. Ask anyone.

Although you needn't ask Rwanda's President Paul Kagame. He'll tell you and all of Twitter exactly what's wrong with Arsenal whether you ask him or not.

But that's last week's news. This week everyone is in a frenzy about Cristiano Ronaldo heading back to Manchester United. Yes, he of the chiselled features, the iconic wink, the body of a Greek god and the unsavoury allegations of rape.

Suddenly, we're thinking that if deeply upsetting accusations of abuse can get you a spot in a premiership side then, oh boy, have we got some contenders for you here on the continent.

Of course, they'd need to be more than

just a violent, narcissistic brute. Other skills are required on the field, too, but not to worry, our leaders have plenty to offer.

Endurance: Why, some of them have been in office for over 30 years, haven't they? Tick.

Balance and co-ordination: The army in one pocket, the judiciary in the other and the inspector-general of police on speed dial, ready to take instruction? Tick.

Defence and goalkeeping: Keeping corrupt colleagues from facing prosecution is no easy feat, yet here some of them are, blocking justice left, right and centre! Double tick.

And, of course, speed: Who among us could possibly hit the internet switch-off button more quickly than our trigger-happy hegemonists? Even South Sudan is looking agile on this front, managing to sneak in a sudden internet disruption ahead of demonstrations by The People's Coalition for Civil Action (PCCA), which has called for the country's leaders to resign. Tick.

Another useful attribute in a football star is plausible deniability: "A red card, ref? What foul?! I didn't touch him!" Just like South Sudan's government, when they insisted they hadn't blocked the internet at all, telling local media outlet Eye Radio that it was a "technical problem."

Tick.

See no Yves, hear no Yves

People we do wish would be sent off the field are the decision-makers at the Nouvelle Chaîne Ivoirienne TV channel in Côte d'Ivoire, alongside presenter Yves de M'Bella. On his show this week, De M'Bella interviewed a convicted rapist and, presenting with a mannequin, asked him to demonstrate how he raped women. Offensive attempts at humour coupled with shockingly inappropriate lines of questioning turned the already tasteless segment into a horrifying and abhorrent trash fire. Viewers took to social media in protest, lodging complaints and setting up a petition calling for M'Bella's show to be cancelled.

Afterwards, De M'Bella apologised for what he said was an attempt to "raise awareness" (of what? How awful a person he is?) and was suspended for a whole (gasp!) 30 days. It was later revealed that he had also been handed a 12-month suspended jail sentence for condoning rape, was ordered to pay a \$3,500 fine, and has been banned from leaving the city of Abidjan. No away games for Yves!

Bring it home

There's one area in which we Africans are definitely lagging behind our European counterparts, though: We don't have as much experience as they do in competing on a level playing field. On the other hand, we could definitely teach them a thing or two about sportsmanship.

Both of these issues were thrown into sharp relief at the latest World Health Organisation Africa media briefing this week, when director Dr Matshidiso



Red flag: Overpaid and accused of rape. Photo: Twitter/ManUtd

Moeti announced that "less than 3% of Africa's population are fully vaccinated." Meanwhile, the European Union says a whopping 70% of their adults are now fully vaccinated.

See? It's amazing what you can do when you're willing to block Covid-19 vaccine patent waivers, jump any pesky queues, and even hoard extra vaccines just in case you fancy a booster shot later.

But maybe the European side is starting to realise the crowd has turned against them. On Thursday, Zimbabwean billionaire Strive Masiyiwa – who has been hustling his socks off trying to get vaccines into Africa – announced that Johnson & Johnson vaccines being made in South Africa would no longer be sent to Europe. What's more, J&J vaccines that have already been sent to Europe are being returned to the continent.

Even the EU's own health authorities agree: the more people we vaccinate, and the quicker we do it, the less chance this stupid virus will have to mutate into something even more dangerous.

We guess it's one of the things that sports fans around the world will just have to get used to: When Africa plays, everybody wins. ■

Should *The Continent* take an advertising deal from a major bank?

Last week, we asked you whether we should accept an advertising deal offered to us by a major bank. Under the terms of the deal, the bank would place adverts in *The Continent*, alongside stories on topics that it has chosen, including inclusive financing, environmental sustainability, promoting a just society, and education and skills development.

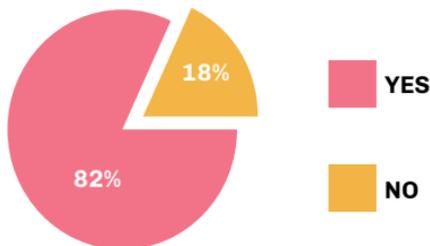
It would be up to *The Continent's* editorial team to decide how to interpret those topics and what stories to pursue, and all stories would uphold the publication's strict editorial standards.

The feedback we received from subscribers and readers of *The Continent* was thoughtful and considered.

We received 445 responses, with 363 people (82%) saying we should accept the deal, while 82 (18%) advised against it.

In the 'no' camp, the most common concern voiced was around maintaining our editorial independence. Beauregard in South Africa said: "Would you have written the story if the bank was NOT sponsoring it? In this way, the bank sets the agenda." Dickson in Kenya pointed out that the repercussions of saying yes may only be felt in the future. "There will be times when they will not like the content you have chosen to publish and that will be the beginning of your problems. You will have gotten used to the funding and be scared of losing it."

For those in favour of the deal*, the



main consideration was ensuring that the publication has enough money to keep doing high-quality journalism. "Quality journalism is expensive," said Oluwaseun in Nigeria.

Lydia in Uganda said: "I would like you to do what you do, for a long time into the future, and recognise that this would require financing ... if they ever ask to have a say on what stories look like, walk out. But as long as you have editorial control ... secure your longevity."

Weighing up the feedback from readers, as well as our own concerns, the editorial team at *The Continent* has decided to accept the advertising deal.

It's a trial run: If it doesn't work for us – and more importantly, if it in any way undermines the journalism we do – then we will not take similar deals in the future. Thank you for helping us make this decision. ■

**Special mention to a certain "Robert Mugabe" from Zimbabwe who observed, not inaccurately: "I always took the money."*

THE BIG PICTURE

Coming up for air: A soldier watches the arrival of a migrant, one of about 8,000 Moroccans who arrived on the shores of Ceuta in Spain in May after swimming across the Tarajal pass. Thousands of would-be migrants have since been returned to Morocco. Photo: Diego Radames/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images



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