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LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF THE VIRUS

Long Covid
in Lagos



Illustration: Oshomah Abubakar



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN COVID WON'T GO AWAY?

Fatigue, brain fog, joint aches, fever, and body pains. These are some of the symptoms that some patients around the world are experiencing weeks and even months after a supposed recovery from Covid-19. It has impacted them emotionally, financially and health-wise. But there has been little to no discussion about Long Covid, as it is known, in an African context (p15).

Cover illustration by Lagos-based illustrator and animator Oshomah Abubakar. Follow him on Instagram @Oshomah.

Inside:

- **News:** Yet another Rwandan opposition leader is murdered (p7)
- **Music:** Go behind the scenes at a Burna Boy shoot (p9)
- **Fela, Femi, Made:** Three generations, one message (p12)
- **Interview:** We can't accept 100,000 deaths as normal, says Africa CDC head (p19)
- **Comment:** The enigma of Idi Amin (p26)



'That's Dan Gertler. We are going to have problems.'

At their office in Kinshasa, two bankers crossed paths with a controversial Israeli billionaire. Suddenly, they had a choice to make. Should they keep quiet about what they had seen, or could they risk speaking out? Find out more on page 22.

The Week in Numbers

56%

The share of the vote won by Mohamed Bazoum in Niger's February 21 presidential election. The former interior minister and handpicked candidate of the outgoing President Mahamadou Issoufou defeated former president Mahamane Ousmane in the second round of voting, after no candidate won 50% of the votes in the first round in December.

1 in 5

The number of people who may have already contracted Covid in Lagos, according to a survey by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and the Institute for Medical Research. The study, conducted in September and October last year, found that 23% of respondents had antibodies, suggesting the number of infections might be far higher than previously thought.



600,000

The number of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine doses that arrived in Ghana this week – as pictured here – from the Serum Institute in India. The West African country became the first country to receive doses under the Covax initiative — the UN-backed vaccine programme established to ensure low- and middle-income countries have access to Covid-19 vaccines. Ghana's vaccination programme will begin on Tuesday, March 2.

39

The number of African countries that will now be able to enjoy Spotify's services. The music and podcast streaming firm this week announced an expansion across the continent, after years of being available only in some north African countries and South Africa.

\$109-million

The amount TymeBank, a South African digital bank, raised from investors in the United Kingdom and the Philippines. The bank, which has more than 2.7-million customers in the country, offers accounts with little or no monthly fees, as well as a savings product.

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Tanzania

Government changes course on Covid-19

President John Magufuli, who has spent the past nine months insisting that Tanzania is entirely Covid-free, has not quite admitted that he was wrong. However, in a speech last Sunday, he did make an important concession, acknowledging that there has been a dramatic increase in respiratory diseases, and that Tanzanians must start taking basic precautions.

The president urged citizens to wear face masks (but, bizarrely, urged them to avoid wearing foreign masks). Several hours later, the health ministry released a statement repeating this advice, and asking people to wash their hands regularly.

The president has been under enormous pressure, both at home and abroad, as the impact of the pandemic in Tanzania has become impossible to ignore. Not only are doctors and hospitals saying that cases are surging, based on their own Covid tests and clinical

assessments, but a number of prominent politicians and government leaders have died recently after presenting Covid-like symptoms. Things got so serious that even the World Health Organisation, which is often slow to criticise sovereign states, weighed in, urging Tanzania to take “robust action” against the virus.

The government still has some learning to do, however. In a surreal press conference on Tuesday, a clearly ill Finance Minister Philip Mpango addressed reporters to dispel rumours that he had died of Covid-19. He was not wearing a mask, and coughed his way through a statement.

The president urged citizens to wear face masks (but, bizarrely, urged them to avoid wearing foreign masks)

Magufuli has once again urged the country to participate in three days of national prayer to combat an unspecified “respiratory illness”.

It was after three days of prayer in May that Magufuli declared that Covid-19 was no longer present in Tanzania, and the government stopped testing and scrapped all precautionary measures. ■

DR Congo

Italian ambassador among three killed in attack

An attack near Goma in the eastern North Kivu Province on Monday left the Italian ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo and two others dead. Ambassador Luca Attanasio, 43, his bodyguard, 30-year-old Vittorio Iacovacci of the Italian military police and their Congolese driver, Mustapha Milambo, a 16-year-veteran of the World Food Programme (WFP), were killed by unknown assailants on a trip from Goma to Rutshuru, a town about 40 kilometres north.

The trio were part of a two-car convoy en route to visit a WFP school feeding project. They were forced to disembark by an armed group and Milambo was killed, the WFP said. The remaining six passengers were forced into the surrounding bush in a kidnapping attempt. Park rangers and a Congolese Army unit nearby exchanged gunfire with the gunmen, during which Attanasio and Iacovacci were seriously injured. Attanasio died at a UN hospital in Goma. The WFP said the other passengers, all



Scene of the crime: Moroccan peacekeepers on patrol in Virunga in the wake of the ambassador's death. (Photo: Alexis Huguet/AFP)

staff members of the organisation, were “safe and accounted for.” The WFP said the attack “occurred on a road that had previously been cleared for travel without security escorts” and the United Nations Department for Safety and Security will now carry out a review of the incident.

The attack took place around Virunga National Park, Africa's first national park and a Unesco World Heritage site, which has become a hotbed of armed conflict by disparate groups competing for influence in the region along the DRC's borders with Uganda and Rwanda. Six park rangers were killed in an ambush last month. Another 12 rangers were killed last year in an attack the park blamed on the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, a Rwandan rebel group prominent in the region. ■

South Africa



(Photo: David Harrison/
The Continent)

Murder... or assassination?

The Rwandan community in South Africa grapples with yet another high-profile killing

Simon Allison

The picture above was taken in Nyanga township, near Cape Town in South Africa. It is the scene of a crime. It is here that a 49-year-old bed salesman named Seif Bamporiki was murdered on Sunday evening, just before dusk, as he was delivering a new bed to a customer. The two unidentified gunmen then stole his money and drove off with his truck.

“He was a wonderful man,” Etienne Mutabazi, a friend, told *The Continent*. “A family man. His death comes as a great

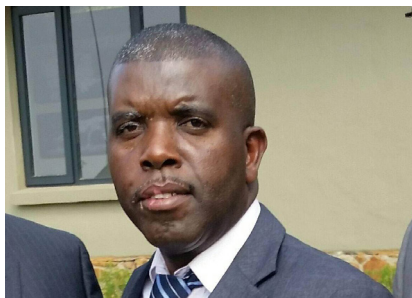
loss to me at a personal level.”

Mutabazi does not believe that this was any ordinary murder. Outside of his day job, Bamporiki had another role: he was the chairman in South Africa of the Rwandan National Congress (RNC), an opposition movement that is banned in Rwanda.

He was also a very public thorn in the side of the Rwandan government. Both Bamporiki and Mutabazi were among a group of Rwandans in South Africa who sued Paul Kagame’s government at the African Court on Human and People’s



A dangerous business: Bamporiki was killed while delivering a bed in the Nyanga township. (Photo: David Harrison/The Continent)



Family man: Bamporiki is survived by his wife and three children

Rights, demanding that their Rwandan passports be reinstated. The court ruled in their favour, finding that the group's passports had been unlawfully revoked without their notification.

Political opponents of the Rwandan government have a history of being abducted or assassinated – especially when they belong to the RNC.

Mutabazi reels off the list. Faustin Nyamwasa, a former army general and co-founder of the RNC, has survived four alleged assassination attempts in South

Africa. Patrick Karegeya, the former spy chief and fellow RNC co-founder, was killed in a Johannesburg hotel room on New Year's Eve in 2013.

Paul Rusesabagina, the inspiration for Hotel Rwanda who saved hundreds of lives during the genocide, was tricked into boarding a private jet bound for Kigali, where he stands accused of terrorism.

Bamporiki was assassinated on Kigali's orders, Mutabazi believes.

The police are not so sure.

They are treating it as a robbery, but are still investigating. The Rwandan High Commission in South Africa did not respond to repeated attempts to reach them for comment.

Mutabazi is also an RNC member, and acts as the group's spokesperson. He and others among the Rwandan community in South Africa worry about who will be next. "We cannot live in constant fear. We know that everyone has his day. We are cautious, we liaise with authorities whenever we feel threatened, but it's not an easy thing to live with." ■



The making of a Burna Boy music video

A visual accompaniment to the song *Onyeka*, from his acclaimed album *Twice As Tall*, Burna Boy's latest music video adds to the sensory tapestry of African storytelling. The polychromatic vignette is set in Accra, Ghana and features vivid images of life in the district of Jamestown, as well as sultry interactions between transfixing lovers. **Refiloe Seiboko** spoke to both producer Leke Alabi-Isama and the video's director, Director K, about their inspirations and experience creating the video.

The Burna Boy experience

Producer Leke Alabi-Isama:

Working with Burna has to do a lot with precision. He just needs you to tell him what to do. He's switched on. You need to know what you're telling him to do, Burna doesn't mess around.

Pandemic shooting

Alabi-Isama: I don't know how many Covid tests we had to do ... it was a lot of planning, it was a lot of logistics. We had to have a rather large set, somewhat, so that people could socially distance, and masks on and all of that.

Musings

Director K: It's a love song, so I thought let's celebrate the special person in our lives and also celebrate Africa. Showcase Africa, showcase how beautiful Africa is ... The locations, the people.

Setting/location

Alabi-Isama: Jamestown is a really chilled part of Accra, it's right by the waterside. It's a fisherman's town. And the people of Jamestown are very art-inclined, so you'd see the beauty in their colourfulness ... Generally, Accra, they have interesting colours, their homes are interesting, it's like a little Havana in Africa. We tried to showcase all of that in the transport systems – the big truck, the boda-bodas – and the post office, the letter boxes...



Resonance

Alabi-Isama: We wanted people across the globe, across the continent, and people in Accra who see these places every day to look again. You know how you see something every day, and after a while it doesn't hold its value?



When you see how it's used in a different way it makes you kind of appreciate what you have a bit more. And for people outside, who maybe don't know it, it makes them either miss home or inquire about, 'Where is this place? This place is cool.'

The room

The pink-walled room, one of the main scenes of the video, is so beautifully authentic that it's difficult to think of it as a constructed set — but it was.

Alabi-Isama: It's an actual room somewhere else, we repurposed it for the shoot to look exactly that way. The idea was to go gritty. Director K chose the colours, because we needed colours that would pop and contrast. Every other thing in the room was thought-up: the TV was purposefully an old tv, the pictures on the wall.

The whole point

Alabi-Isama: We want them to feel loved-up. We want people to watch it and go 'awwww.' ■



Bloodlines:
Femi Kuti
and his son
Made follow
proudly and
dangerously
in Fela's
footsteps

Afrobeat comes full circle

Femi and Made Kuti continue the family legacy

Dika Ofoma

If government no fit do their job (PA PA PA!), *Make them commot there*, goes the chorus to the first track on the joint album between father and son Femi and Made Kuti, son and grandson of the late legendary Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti.

Pà Pà Pà sets the tone for the *Legacy+* album, which continues the Kuti legacy of using music as political and social commentary.

Femi's half of the album is titled after the third track, *Stop the Hate*, and on that and subsequent songs like *Land Grab*, *Privatisation*, he criticises government policies that enriching the political elite at the expense of the impoverished masses.

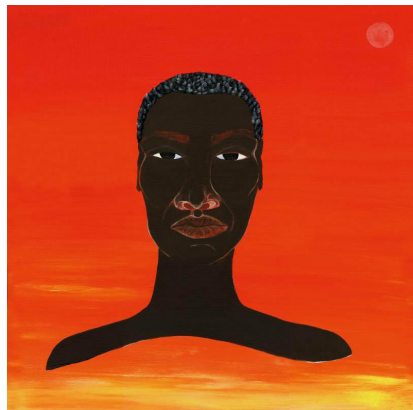
Yet, as he sings in *As We Struggle Everyday*, Nigerians continue to recycle

the same terrible leaders instead of holding them to account: *'See these leaders wey suppose jail, na him my people don dey hail.'*

The tenth and final track on Femi's side of the album, *Set Your Minds and Soul Free*, encourages emancipation from any form of control, be it from corrupt leaders or religious fanatics, paving the way for Made's debut *For(e)ward*, which begins with the jazzy tune *Free Your Mind* — and with the same admonition.

Next on Made's side of the album is *Your Enemy*, a song railing against police brutality but which also tries to understand why the police "are the way they are," pointing listeners to the real enemy: the government.

On *Different Street*, Made is reflective, acknowledging in a monologue that the Kutis have come full circle with this album;



Father and son: Femi and Made Kuti's joint album is a protest against the same leader who locked up Fela Kuti in 1984.

at 25, he is singing about the same things his grandfather sang about decades ago.

Fela Kuti disapproved of the state of things under repressive military regimes. And although Nigeria is a democracy now, it is the same Muhammadu Buhari – who locked up Fela on trumped-up charges in 1984 – who is once again ruling Nigeria with the same despotism.

It seems nothing has changed.

Made closes the album on an optimistic note with *We are Strong*, echoing his father's sentiments in *Young Boy/Young Girl*, charging the youth to action and expressing belief in better times for the country, while hoping the path to revolution does not involve anarchy.

Fela disapproved of the state of things under repressive military regimes. And although Nigeria is a democracy, Buhari is ruling again with the same despotism

Legacy+ stays true to the authentic Afrobeat sound in its protest and criticism of government ineptitude. Due to the paucity of social-conscious songs in Nigeria's pop culture, DJs had to skip back decades during the #EndSARS protests to the tunes of Fela Kuti for music to capture the national mood, and eventually Davido's *Fem* – a song telling a rival to shut up – emerged as the protest's anthem. It's tempting to see *Legacy+* as a response to the movement but in reality, production began long before the October protests.

Despite the album's importance to Nigeria's current sociopolitical climate, its songs may never achieve mainstream popularity – music that does not sound like Wizkid or Davido is considered too esoteric – but it would surely find a home in the ears of Nigerians who have long agitated for songs with a conscience. ■

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

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



How did I do?

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

1. Which lake has more fish species than any other freshwater system on earth?

2. How many charges stemming from South Africa's arms acquisition programme in the late 1990s does former president Jacob Zuma face: 16, 26, or 36?

3. *A Grain of Wheat* is a novel by which Kenyan writer?

4. *Neria* is the highest-grossing film of which country?

5. True or false: Portuguese is an official language in Guinea-Bissau and Equatorial Guinea.

6. Which island

country's name translates to "Saint Thomas and Prince"?

7. The Basilica of Our Lady of Peace (pictured) is located in which country's capital?

8. Isaias Afwerki is the president of which country?

9. Yemi Alade and Tiwa Savage are singers from which country?

10. In which country was Liverpool FC forward Mohamed Salah born?

11. What is Namibia's capital?

12. In which country did the world's first Covax vaccines land this week?

0-4

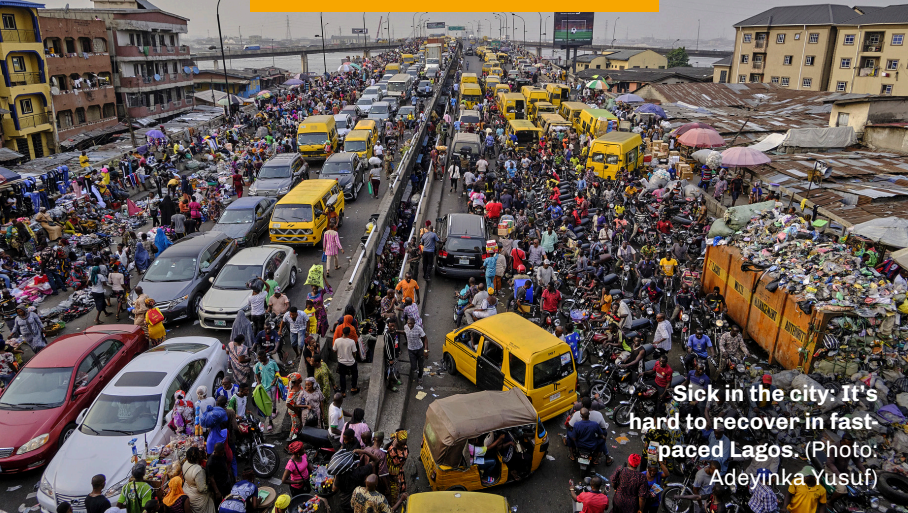
"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

5-8

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

9-12

"I once climbed Kilimanjaro 'cos it was quicker than going round."



Sick in the city: It's hard to recover in fast-paced Lagos. (Photo: Adeyinka Yusuf)

Living with Long Covid in Lagos

Most people who recover from Covid-19 do so in a matter of weeks. But for others, the virus just won't go away

Bolu Akindele

They have tested negative for Covid-19, but they are still fighting for their lives.

Adebola* became ill a few days after attending a party in Lagos last March. Her symptoms mirrored those she was beginning to learn about Covid-19, and they continued to escalate, defying the malaria medication she was taking.

"I was feeling very weak. I had diarrhoea. I couldn't see well. I didn't know what was happening," the 21-year-old tells *The Continent*. She started treatment for Covid-19 a few weeks

later, but her symptoms worsened. "It was really bad talking," she recalls. "I would be choking on air; it was like my mouth was forming air bubbles that would trap my words, and then I would have to gasp really hard for breath."

About a month after she noticed the first set of symptoms, she recovered, and all her symptoms subsided. But her recovery was all too brief.

"I started having a different set of symptoms."

The Long Haul

Medical experts have termed the constellation of symptoms that manifests

Nigeria has deployed trainers to teach people how to curb the spread of the virus, but there is less state support for long-haulers. (Photo: Pius Ekpei/AFP)



in some people after recovering from the coronavirus as “Long Covid” or the Covid Long Haul. Patients may test negative for the virus, but they still feel its lingering effects.

The symptoms of Long Covid are often varied, but the most common ones are fatigue, shortness of breath, cough, joint pain, and chest pain.

The general understanding about Covid-19 in Nigeria is that the virus causes a mild or debilitating illness for a few weeks, depending on underlying health issues, after which most patients recover. However, the existence of Long Covid and its varied manifestations in patients complicates this understanding.

The current stage of research into Long Covid in Nigeria makes it difficult to say in specific terms what makes patients susceptible to it and what the numbers of patients are, says Dr Ifeanyi Nsofor, the director of policy and advocacy at Nigeria Health Watch.

The available studies on Long Covid from abroad are conflicting. A 2020 study by the *British Medical Journal*

found that about 10% of patients who have tested positive for Covid-19 remain unwell beyond three weeks, and a smaller proportion remain unwell for months. Another study puts that figure at 74%.

A survey of 1,655 Covid-19 patients, discharged from a hospital in Wuhan, China and tracked between June and September showed that after six months 76% of them still had at least one symptom, such as fatigue, muscle weakness, or diminished lung function.

But post viral-infection illnesses are not new. Dr Tofunmi Omiye, a healthcare researcher, postulates that post-viral infection illnesses of this nature could be due to any number of conditions.

Some ensue because of the persistence of inflammatory mediators – chemicals released by the body to fight viruses – even after recovering from the virus.

Others are the result of an auto-immune phenomenon where the immune cells created to fight the virus remain active after recovery and attack other parts of the body, while a few others are due to cells not regaining their normal

functioning after dealing with the virus.

Dr John Nkengasong, director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, told *The Continent* that the health agency is convening a panel of experts across the continent to better understand Long Covid, so they can offer guidance to member states on how to care for patients.

A survey of 1,655 Covid-19 patients in China, tracked between June and September 2020, showed that 76% of them still had at least one symptom after six months

“We’re still gathering the evidence so that we can better guide countries in a way that will be driven by data and science,” Nkengasong said. “This is a new virus. I’m a biologist of 32 years, I worked on HIV/Aids for 29 years, you thought you knew it but you never know viruses, how they will impact.”

‘Covid was bad, this is worse’

Chioma Ogwuegbu tested positive for Covid-19 in September 2020 and recovered a few weeks later. But, like Adebola, her symptoms never left. “There’s been a range of things,” she says. “My quality of life kind of reduced.”

Among the symptoms she still feels, months after her recovery from Covid, are fatigue, brain fog, joint aches, fever, and body pains. “Sometimes, I would sit

in the front of the computer, start typing, and then I just wouldn’t know what I was doing or writing.”

At first, she was confused, worried she had contracted Covid again, but after several online searches about her symptoms, she came across Long Covid.

For Ogwuegbu, the most painful part of living with the symptoms is its unpredictability. Once, she almost collapsed in her living room after two online meetings. Now, every morning, she tries to anticipate what symptoms her body will display.

The “medical gaslighting” that comes with sharing these experiences with Nigerian healthcare professionals often makes it harder to seek medical help about their condition.

When Adebola started noticing her symptoms, several doctors told her that it was the psychological effect of having recovered from Covid, a product of her imagination and her anxiety. She didn’t buy it. “Why would I imagine myself having all these things when everybody else is living their lives?” she says.

The consequences of the Long Covid are not just medical. Managing it comes with financial and emotional costs.

“For December and November, I had to reduce my workload drastically,” says Ogwuegbu, who runs a research consulting firm from home. “I had to turn down some jobs.”

The toll for Adebola has also been emotional: her boyfriend broke up with her last year during her ordeal with Long Covid.

“He got tired of me,” she says.



**Long-suffering:
A patient
receives
oxygen therapy
at the Lagos
State Isolation
Centre (Photo:
Pius Ekpei/AFP)**

A way forward

The existence of Long Covid challenges the understanding of the definition of recovery from Covid-19, but Dr Omiye argues that adjusting the language of recovery might have dire consequences on the allocation of funds. For now, treating those testing positive remains the unquestioned priority.

But the lack of a coordinated national policy for understanding and managing Long Covid could cause another public health crisis down the line. It also prevents health workers from being adequately prepared to provide care for patients in need of help or educating Covid patients about the possible long-term effects they might experience.

Dr Oluwasegun Afolaranmi, a physician at St. Nicholas Hospital in Lagos, believes it is important to develop a localised response to Long Covid.

“For all we know, the percentage of Long Haulers may be more or lower in

our environment,” he said, suggesting it might not be comparable with cases in the United States, Europe or Australasia.

“We also don’t know whether the kind of treatment they would need would be different to what is required in other parts of the world, so it is very important that we conduct our own research and generate evidence that will guide our own management and prevention.”

Having lived with the aftereffects of Covid for almost a year now, Adebola is now familiar with the patterns the illness takes. Although she’s afraid of what it would mean for her if Long Haul lingers for much longer, she’s also optimistic about her recovery.

“Maybe we’ll eventually get a Long Covid clinic here, like in other countries,” she says. “Hopefully by then I won’t be sick any more.” ■

** Name changed at the request of the interviewee.*



Leading the way: Africa needs
its own version of the Serum
Institute of India

‘We can’t afford to become the Covid continent’

*The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention only launched in 2017, but between Ebola, measles and the Covid-19 pandemic, it has had its work cut out for it. In a wide-ranging interview, the agency’s director **Dr John Nkengasong** speaks to The Continent about the vaccine rollout, how to strengthen disease response and preparedness in Africa, and the turn of the tide in Tanzania.*

The Continent: In the United Kingdom they’re talking about getting back to normal by their summer. What sort of vaccine timelines should we be thinking about in Africa?

Dr John Nkengasong: In April and May we should hopefully begin to see vaccinations start to pick up here. Covax and the African Vaccine Acquisition Taskforce (Avat) will begin to ship.

This is the timeline I predicted. At the start of the pandemic everybody said the right things about global solidarity and equitable access, but that didn’t translate into action. We failed to translate our public pronouncements into action. Everybody outside of Africa is guilty of that, too. The Chinese president made a strong pronouncement at a summit with African presidents. The G20 made pronouncements. But this didn’t really



Highway to health: ACDC's director, Dr John Nkengasong. (Photo: Michael Tewelde/AFP via Getty Images)

translate into action.

What should Africa do to avoid being in this situation again if or when another pandemic arrives?

We need a new public health order for our security. As a continent. That will hinge on four things.

First, we must invest in manufacturing – here on the continent – of the three interventions: diagnostics, vaccines and therapeutics. Remember in March last year when other countries and blocs were testing? We were not. And that invited stigmatization: 'Africa is not testing'. Until we made all the noises,

organised, got diagnostics from China and started testing.

Second, we have to be very deliberate in our public health workforce development. We need 6,000 epidemiologists. We only have 1,900, on a continent of 1.2-billion people. That's like going to a gunfight with a knife. We need 25,000 front-line responders; we only have about 5,000. That's not acceptable.

Third, we need to strengthen our public health agencies, like the Europeans are doing. They are very quietly empowering their CDC to make its own decisions and have the legal mandate to co-ordinate. Africa CDC is a wonderful vision of our heads of states, but we must give it the autonomy and latitude it needs to work. If you do that, you create a network of national public health institutions that become your "military bases" across the continent.

Lastly, we must engage the private sector. I've learned a lot in this pandemic by working with people like Donald Kaberuka, Strive Masiyiwa, Benedict Oramah and Vera Songwe. These are not public health experts but we come together nearly every week and we think through the issues.

Can you talk us through how the AU and Afreximbank secured vaccines outside of the Covax mechanism?

Covax represents a symbol of global co-operation and solidarity, but it has always been very clear that they will give you, as a continent, 20% of your vaccines. And there's no way to get rid of Covid with

20% vaccination, we need at least 60%.

Europe is trying to vaccinate 80%. The United States is trying to vaccinate everybody. They will finish vaccinating, impose travel restrictions and then Africa becomes “the continent of Covid”.

So that means we had to find additional vaccines. [South Africa's] President Cyril Ramaphosa took that argument to the AU's heads of state in August, with Strive Masiyiwa, and made a case for that. And they said, “Good ... go ahead.” And he put together the African Vaccine Acquisition Taskforce (Avat) and told them to go out there, unapologetically and aggressively, and find us a vaccine.

And they did. They secured the first 270-million doses in the spirit of complementing what Covax is going to give us, to get us to 60%.

Tanzania's president has implied, for the first time in months, that there is Covid there. Have you been able to engage with the country?

We've been using all channels to engage Tanzania. People say, “What is the AU doing? What is the Africa CDC doing?” But that's not how these things work. There's a lot that is being done very quietly. There's no point shouting – Tanzania is a sovereign state, and given the intellectual capacity and capability that exists in Tanzania, probably has some of the best health experts on the continent. We knew they would get there. We continued to engage through different channels, including providing assistance. We are very encouraged with the signals that are coming out of Tanzania.

What do you think about the call for a waiver on patents for Covid vaccines at the World Trade Organisation?

I'm very supportive of it, but we should look at it in a comprehensive way. Let's think through how we get continental manufacturing. We don't need to start by transferring intellectual property. Look at what Serum is doing in India. It's not intellectual property, it's just, “OK, you can manufacture there.”

In the coming weeks, Africa CDC will be convening a meeting and we'll bring all stakeholders to that – Member states, investors, banks, development partners and their funders – to have a comprehensive discussion. About how a continent of 1.2-billion people, potentially 2.4-billion in 30 years, cannot be reliant on Serum Institute, a family business in India, to secure its health security.

I don't know of anything that has challenged the continent after independence more than this current pandemic.

One year ago, if you had said 100,000 Africans would have died because of this, I would have said no, that's too pessimistic.

But that's where we are now.

Not as much as the US, but that doesn't matter: we shouldn't be normalising death. I mean, 100,000 Africans in one year. That is just terrible.

We can't accept that as “normal”.

We must not. ■

Interview by Aanu Adeoye and Simon Allison

Exposing a Congolese bank's dirty secrets

Meet the two whistleblowers who risked everything.



Navy Malela and
Gradi Koko. (Photos:
Liran Hutmacher)



Simon Allison

There was nothing particularly exceptional about the day that Gradi Koko's life changed forever.

It was early 2018, and he was at his office. He was working in the Kinshasa branch of Afriland First Bank, in the upmarket Gombe district, near government buildings and embassies. Returning to his desk, he passed someone on their way to the restroom. It was a man who looked vaguely familiar, flanked by a security guard, coming from the office of the bank's director-general.

When he sat down, his colleague Navy Malela called him over. "Did you see that person?" said Malela. "That's Dan Gertler. We are going to have problems."

In hindsight, that was putting it mildly. Not only because of Gertler, who was "just" a businessman blacklisted by the United States. But because the plot, as they say, was about to thicken.

Blacklisted

Koko had always wanted to be a banker, like his father before him, and his career was going strong. In just five years, he had risen to become Afriland's head

of accounting and risk, which meant it was his job to make sure the bank did everything by the book. It was a heavy responsibility, and one he took seriously.

He asked Malela what he knew about the unusual visitor. Malela said Gertler was an Israeli businessman who was close friends with the president, Joseph Kabila. He was in mining. He was rarely far from scandal. And, most concerning of all – from the bank's perspective – that just months previously the US had targeted him with economic sanctions due to allegations that his vast fortune had been won through corrupt oil and mining deals.

This meant that Gertler, worth more than a billion dollars, was not supposed to be doing business with any bank anywhere in the world that deals in US dollars – and that included Afriland.

This was more than enough for Koko to launch his own internal investigation. A few weeks later, in a letter seen by *The Continent*, he wrote to Afriland's director-general, Patrick Kafindo, to express his reservations about Gertler's accounts, and others he believed were linked to Gertler.

Koko said that he was immediately summoned into Patrick Kafindo's office.

"The bank director was mad," Koko told *The Continent*. "He said that these persons were not random individuals. He said Kinshasa is a dangerous place, I might go into the street and get shot."

Koko was horrified. He knew, right then and there, that his career was over. He couldn't keep quiet. Nor could he speak out without endangering himself and his family. Not in Kinshasa, at least.



Mined the gap: Dan Gertler's deals in the DRC are under scrutiny. (Photo: Simon Dawson/Bloomberg via Getty)

A few days later, he fled to Europe, along with his wife and children. He took a trove of bank documents with him. These later formed the basis of several hard-hitting reports, including by Global Witness and Bloomberg, that accused Dan Gertler of using Afriland to transfer tens of millions of dollars internationally, circumventing the sanctions regime.

Gertler strongly denies these allegations – he says the documents were illegally obtained and fabricated – and is suing for defamation in a court in Paris.

The bank director, Kafindo, echoed this complaint. He said the whistleblowers had forged documents, and had never brought their concerns to him. He

questioned their motives: “I don’t come to tell stories to get a visa in Europe,” Kafindo told RFI’s Sonia Rolley in an interview last week.

Koko, meanwhile, says he has no regrets. “I did it for my country. Yes, my life in Kinshasa was better. But this is not about me. It’s about my profession. I needed to respect the role of banker.”

A life in exile

For his own protection, there are details about Koko’s flight from Kinshasa and his current location that cannot be made public. What we can say is that after leaving Kinshasa, and from a place of relative safety but with money running low, he considered his next steps.

For inspiration, Koko read up on the fate of another Congolese banker-turned-whistleblower: Jean-Jacques Lumumba, the grand-nephew of independence leader Patrice, who exposed alleged fraud connected to the family of former president Joseph Kabila.

When Lumumba raised the alarm with the head of the bank, he was threatened with a gun. He too sought safety outside of the DRC, and has subsequently become a prominent anti-corruption crusader.

Lumumba received support in exile from the Platform to Protect Whistleblowers in Africa, better known by the French acronym PPLAAF. Following in his footsteps, in early 2019, Koko sent a Facebook message to PPLAAF. He said he was ready to blow the whistle, and had the documents to prove it. It was these documents that formed the basis of the media reports

into Afriland last year. But soon PPLAAF noticed something strange. Some of the documents were dated after Koko had fled Kinshasa.

There was a second whistleblower.

Just in case

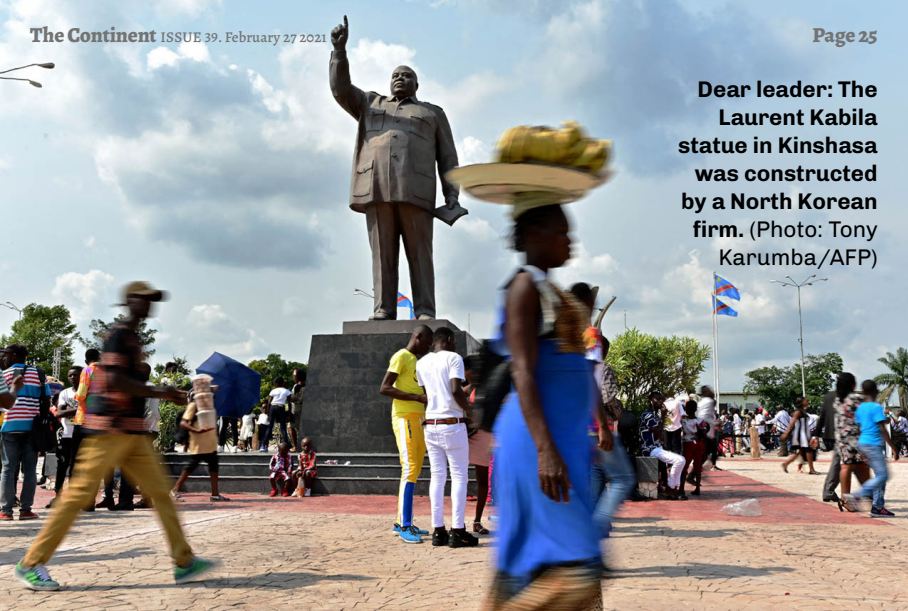
In Kinshasa, Navy Malela was nervous. He had stayed on at the bank after Koko left, but everyone there knew the two of them were close, and that he had helped with the initial investigation. He wasn’t sure what to do. But just in case the worst happened, he started copying documents – which, as an IT specialist, was easy enough to do. “I told myself it might protect me but I had no idea how,” he told *The Continent*. He shared some of these with Koko.

Eventually the stress, and the fear, became too much, and in early 2019 he put his wife and children on a plane to Europe, with support from PPLAAF. A few days later, he followed them, claiming asylum.

To protect both Koko and Malela from retribution, their exact locations are not being disclosed. His kids go to school, but neither Malela nor his wife can work. They miss Kinshasa every day. “It’s my country. Kinshasa is where I grew up. I miss my city, I miss the heat, and I miss my life. The first moment I can, I will go back,” he said.

Like Koko, Malela brought a stash of documents with him. But these were far more extensive. They provided extraordinary insight into the inner workings of Afriland First Bank’s Congolese branch, and raised a number

Dear leader: The Laurent Kabila statue in Kinshasa was constructed by a North Korean firm. (Photo: Tony Karumba/AFP)



of red flags. The kind that set off klaxons and put the entire base on high alert.

For it is not just Dan Gertler and his alleged associates who have been allegedly skirting the legalities of international sanctions regimes through the Afriland bank on Kinshasa.

The documents reveal connections to companies with alleged links to Hezbollah (the Lebanese Islamist group, considered by the US to be a terrorist organisation); and to a construction firm linked to the North Korean government, which was revealed by *The Sentry* last year to be part of Pyongyang's efforts to evade economic sanctions.

The leaked documents also provide fascinating insight into the enormous sums that flow into and out of the bank accounts of some of Congo's political elite, including Zoe Kabila (brother of Joseph); Richard Muyej, the governor of

the copper-rich Lualaba Province; and the official account of the country's senate.

The documents are not necessarily proof of wrongdoing, but do raise uncomfortable questions for the implicated parties; and especially for Afriland, whose credibility and due diligence has been called into question.

And that, as far as the whistleblowers are concerned, is the point. "What I want is for Congolese authorities to investigate these affairs," said Malela. "I don't understand why they haven't already."

"Thanks to the silent revolution of whistleblowers like Gradi [Koko] and Navy [Malela] on the African continent, no crime will remain a secret forever, and the change we desire will eventually make itself felt," said the other famous Congolese whistleblower, Jean-Jacques Lumumba. "Acts like theirs are a hope for the DRC and for our continent." ■



The many faces of Idi Amin

Last month marked half a century since the infamous Ugandan leader seized power in a coup. But his legacy is hard to pin down.

Eric Mwine-Mugaju

It seems no African leader has generated as much intrigue as Idi Amin Dada, the self-styled conqueror of the British Empire and Ugandan dictator. He was cruel and unusual, but not uniquely so. How did he earn a uniquely infamous status in the horrible dictators' hall of fame?

He has featured in three films: *Mississippi Masala*, *The Raid on Entebbe*

and *The Last King of Scotland* (which won an Oscar). Almost all of which portray Amin as a crazed and unfathomable man. He persists in popular culture well beyond his native Uganda nearly two decades after his demise.

I was born shortly after the collapse of his regime and, in travelling widely in Uganda, living and studying in the United Kingdom, and working in West Africa, I have met many different versions of Amin.

As a child, I knew Idi Amin as a comical character. If you spoke broken English, you would be the subject of endless ridicule and labelled Amin. It did not help that his nickname was *chikito* ("big shoe" in Runyankole, the language spoken in south-western Uganda) on account of his big feet. This is the caricature we children knew him as.

In secondary school, I grew to understand Amin as a dictator who would not hesitate to kill. The memory of the funny, oafish and big-footed dancer quickly faded.

I would learn from my older siblings of the "random" disappearances that plagued our area under his reign. Claims of Amin's cannibalism and feasting on his own son Moses abounded. Although of dubious provenance, these were the stories Hollywood would later seize on.

When I moved to Europe, I met two more Idi Amins. One was the man who put Uganda on the map for London's average Joe, courtesy of Western-centric

films and documentaries.

Six times in 10, Idi Amin's name would pop up in the first minute of conversation after it emerges I am from Uganda. "Oh wow ... Idi Amin!" At other times, people who had not heard of Uganda nevertheless knew of Idi Amin; it was almost like Idi Amin was Uganda.

Ugandan Asians also cross my path, my accent easily giving me away. Habari, most of them greet in Swahili adding, "I was born in Jinja [in eastern Uganda]".

When we reminisce, I usually feel an awkward kind of collective responsibility for how they were treated. I find myself explaining how relations have improved back home. Despite their misfortune, they often share fond memories of Uganda. Some even invest millions in African development, such as Firoz Lalji, a Canadian of Ugandan-Indian heritage, who funded the London School of Economics' Africa Centre.

But what is often forgotten about Amin is the ideology that rationalised his most notorious actions: "Africanisation", a disastrous quest to undo colonial economic inequalities — also embodied by his contemporary, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. After mixing with wealthy, educated kids in London, I started meeting Amin sympathisers — some daring to interrogate the historical amnesia surrounding colonisation and "the empire". Too often, many were happy to ignore Amin's bloodthirsty paranoia in favour of his ideology.

Amin was himself a creation of "empire". The British mistakenly believed he would be their puppet after he

overthrew the socialist Milton Obote. However, he soon proved to be eccentric, unpredictable and uncompromising.

For Hollywood, this is what made Amin a joke for us as children, what made him fantastic film fodder: the stereotype of a paranoid African ruler that pervades mainstream films primarily aimed at a white audience. That said, as with most stereotypes, enough was true for it to persist: He really was naturally eccentric, larger than life and, in all honesty, kind of funny.

In Uganda today, Museveni's government is obliged to preserve Idi Amin's memory — if only to cash in on his infamy. An Idi Amin museum is being planned, after the successful exhibition of "the Unseen Archives of Idi Amin", which featured 70,000 negatives of previously unseen photos.

In short, we have a character who is vilified by the West yet loved by Hollywood; a comic character for children in Uganda who is lauded by the Arab world for "standing with his Muslim brothers" after allowing a plane hijacked by Palestinians to land at Entebbe airport.

Amin made and followed his own rules. He was not simply a politician. While others like Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta, played politics to their personal advantage Idi Amin was unique in his poor grasp of politics, his sense of unrealistic optimism, and the means he used to achieve his ends.

Fifty years later, the many faces of Idi Amin have still not resolved into a coherent portrait. As for his place in history? Perhaps it may suffice that is simply that. History. ■

The Ugandan military's catch-22

Eriasa Mukiibi

Uganda's military has a big problem. Having abducted individuals across the country, it is now under pressure to prove that those who have been snatched are in custody. But despite having been asked to produce a list of names, the police are reluctant to get involved before the military allows them to see the people concerned – because they don't want to be held accountable for individuals who may have been killed or badly beaten.

How did we get here?

The army worked around the clock to procure electoral victory for Yoweri Museveni, in power since January 1986, against the youthful pop-star-turned-politician Robert Kyagulanyi, aka Bobi Wine, who initially challenged the result in the country's highest court but now says he has lost interest in the case – before it is even heard – and says he is appealing in the court of public opinion. This is code for calling for protests.

The fear of Ugandans taking to the streets has sent Museveni's soldiers into overdrive over the past few months, clamping down on Wine's supporters. At least 54 were gunned down in mid-

November last year as they protested against Wine's arrest, and hundreds more were maimed.

Established protocols for arrest were violated as armed operatives – often in civilian clothing – waylaid their targets in streets and other places and forced them into white Toyota HiAce vans, which Ugandans now call “drones”. Those abducted were allegedly kept in ungazetted places, badly tortured, and in some cases later dumped in dark places in the worst of shape. There are no definite numbers but many believe that hundreds have been affected.

At least 54 protestors were gunned down in mid-November last year

With the election over and pressure mounting from the international community, Museveni wants a return to normalcy and has said there are no abductions, stating that whoever is said to be missing is in the custody of the security forces. The military – and the police – now find themselves in the extremely difficult and embarrassing position of not being able to substantiate the statements of their commander-in-chief. ■

Eriasa Mukiibi is a Ugandan journalist who is interested in politics and investigative journalism.





The Big Picture

Inside the swarm: Desert locusts in Meru, Kenya, in early February, shortly after being sprayed with pesticide from the air. East Africa is experiencing one of the worst infestations of locusts in history, but modern technology and tracking have helped to prevent some of the damage to crops caused by the insects. (Photo: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP)

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