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**Queer in
Uganda:**
A photo essay

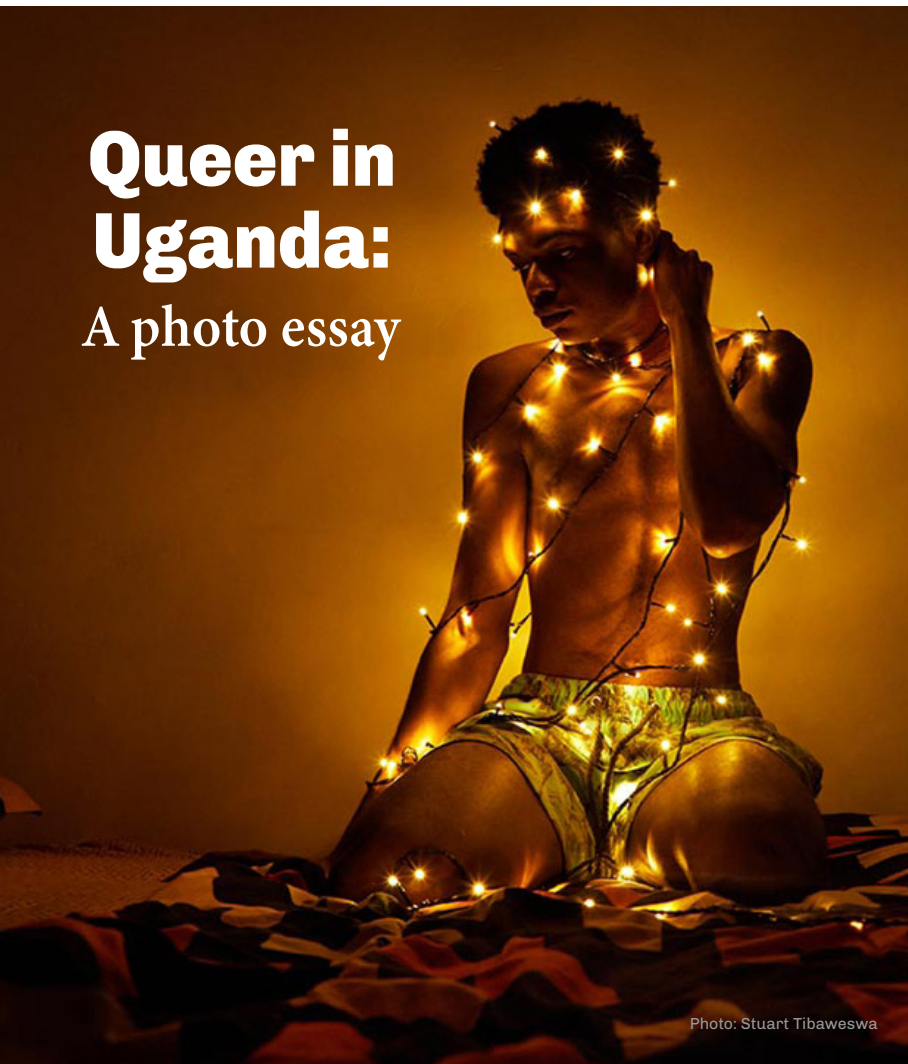


Photo: Stuart Tibaweswa

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Also inside:

VACCINES

Everything you need to know this week

- **What is vaccine nationalism** and why is the African Union so worried? (p5)
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COVER STORY: Uganda's politicians talk a LOT about the country's LGBTQIA+ community – and they rarely have anything nice to say. We don't often get to hear the other side of that story. So Stuart Tibaweswa, a photographer based in Kampala, decided to turn the tables. He asked queer Ugandans what they think of their politicians, and documented their responses in a stunning photo essay (p18). Visit www.stuarttibaweswa.com to check out Stuart Tibaweswa's portfolio.

The Week in Numbers

580,000

The number of young people who have disappeared from Rwanda's official statistics, according to the pan-African news and analysis platform *African Arguments*. In an article on the statistical anomaly, the writers suggest that young people were not picked up in surveys due to either seasonal or permanent migration to Uganda, the DRC, and Burundi, seeking work in agriculture and the tertiary sector.

\$120

The average price of a kilogram of khat in Mogadishu, according to the BBC. Its value soared when Kenya imposed a ban on the export of the narcotic leaf as part of a diplomatic dispute. Kenya has now lifted the ban, and prices are expected to plummet.

0

The number of active Covid-19 cases in Tanzania, according to the East African country's president, John Magufuli. This seems improbable at best. The country has not published official virus data since June.

750

The number of juvenile and adult pelicans found dead in the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary in Senegal last Saturday. Authorities have ordered autopsies and analysed water samples to determine the cause of the deaths.

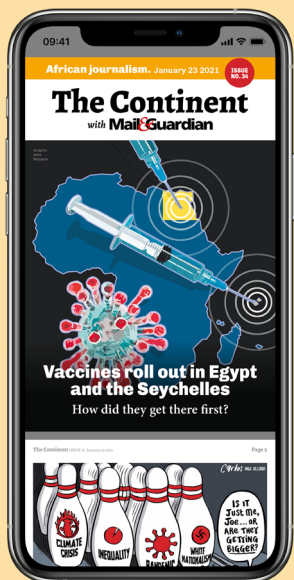


61 years

The length of time since Britain illegally seized control of the Chagos Islands. It brutally evicted all the islanders and rented the land to the United States, which built a military base. A United Nations court ruled this week that the islands are being "unlawfully occupied" and rightfully belong to Mauritius.

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World

Ramaphosa rebukes West for hoarding Covid vaccines

Sarah Smit

The South African government is “deeply concerned” about vaccine nationalism, President Cyril Ramaphosa said during his address at the World Economic Forum’s Davos Dialogues on Tuesday. Ramaphosa is currently chair of the African Union.

“The rich countries of the world went out and acquired large doses of vaccines from the manufacturers and developers of these vaccines. And some countries went even beyond and acquired up to four times what their populations need,” Ramaphosa said, discussing his country’s economic recovery plan from Covid-19. “And that was aimed at hoarding the vaccines. This is being done to the exclusion of other countries in the world that most need this.”

Highlighting efforts to acquire vaccines for African countries, he said the Covid-19 African vaccine

acquisition task team — established to find funding for vaccines — had secured a provisional 270-million doses from vaccine manufacturers. This was in addition to the 600-million doses expected from the World Health Organisation’s Covax initiative.

“Through its participation in these continental and global initiatives, South Africa continues to promote the need for universal, fair and equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.”

Ramaphosa’s address comes on the back of his announcement on Monday that South Africa will soon receive its first batch of vaccines from India’s Serum Institute.

During the Davos discussion, Ramaphosa implored governments hoarding vaccines to release the excess doses they have ordered. “There is just no need for a country which has about 40-million people to go and acquire 160-million doses ... the world needs access to those vaccines.”

Notably, Canada has pre-ordered enough vaccines to inoculate each of its citizens six times over. The United Kingdom and United States have secured four vaccine doses per person, while the European Union and Australia have pre-ordered enough doses to cover each of their citizens twice. ■

Guinea

He's rich, he's crooked, he's guilty – and he's free to go

Corrupt tycoon gets to walk away after a cozy deal with prosecutors, despite Guinea con job

In July 2008, the mining world was shocked when the government of Guinea suddenly stripped Rio Tinto of a lucrative iron ore concession in the Simandou Mountains.

Shortly afterwards, the concession was awarded to a mysterious billionaire named Beny Steinmetz: one of Israel's richest men. Steinmetz had no previous experience in either Guinea or the complicated business of iron ore extraction, and no one could figure out how he landed the deal.

Now a court in Switzerland has confirmed what journalists and activists have been saying for years – the deal was crooked. In a judgment delivered last Friday, Steinmetz was found guilty of paying millions of dollars in bribes to the wife of then-president Lansana Conté.



Fraudster: Beny Steinmetz bribed his way into a lucrative mining deal

He was sentenced to five years in prison and fined a whopping \$56.5-million.

Steinmetz will appeal the verdict.

Although this is a landmark ruling for the historically murking mining industry, Steinmetz is unlikely to actually set foot in prison. After making a deal with Swiss prosecutors, who promised not to detain him, he fled home to Israel. Israel does not extradite its nationals.

The fine, if it is ever paid, is unlikely to be returned to the Guinean people who were the ultimate victims of the con. ■

New republic, same leaders, new mandate, same problem

ANALYSIS

Sidy Yansané

President Alpha Condé has a new slogan. In 2010, it was “Guinea is back”; now “Governing differently!” has become the official mantra of the Fourth Republic, established after the adoption in March 2020 of a controversial new constitution which is still being contested by opposition and civil society.

This is Condé’s third term in office, following his re-election in October last year. The “Professor”, as he is nicknamed, has (once again) promised major reforms to drive development.

But more than a month after his inauguration, it is hard to discern any real change.

On 15 January, Prime Minister Ibrahima Kassory Fofana was reappointed. Four days later, he unveiled the new cabinet, which looked very familiar — almost all ministers had been retained, including Zenab Nabaya Dramé, the minister of technical education and vocational training, who is currently at the heart of \$20-million corruption scandal.

“Keeping Kassory Fofana as head

of government confirms that the head of state has chosen continuity,” said Kabinet Fofana, director of the Guinean Association of Political Sciences. “It looks more like a reward for his political activism in favour of the president, even though economically and socially his record as prime minister is rather negative.”

Hundreds of people remain in prison, arrested in connection with the October election, including several opposition party figures and civil society leaders. Some have died in custody due to ill health. No investigation has been launched to shed light on the dozens of people killed by gunshots during the popular protests.

The “Professor”, as he is nicknamed, has (once again) promised major reforms. But more than a month after his inauguration, it is hard to discern any real change

The political context remains fragile and the pressure on political opposition is increasing. The Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) and the other major opposition parties no longer have MPs after boycotting the legislative elections of March 2020, meaning that the ruling party is in complete control of the National Assembly.

Governing differently? More like governing indifferently. ■

South Africa

Top spy spills Zuma secrets

SA's former president now has some difficult questions to answer

Emma Balfour

Loyiso Jafta is South Africa's top spy. He's a career intelligence officer who is now acting director-general of the State Security Agency, a position he has held since 2018.

On Tuesday, Jafta was called to appear before the Zondo commission – an official inquiry into alleged corruption that occurred during former president Jacob Zuma's time in office.

The commission has witnessed plenty of shocking revelations, but perhaps none as extraordinary as Jafta's testimony. Under oath, he said that the spy agency was flagrantly abused to support a particular faction within the ruling African National Congress, and to further Zuma's personal and political whims.

Jafta did not claim that Zuma ordered transgressions, but that several agents broke the rules in a bid to please him.

In the most salacious example, Jafta said that state security agents were roped

in to detain Zuma's wife Nompumelelo Ntuli-Zuma, because Zuma suspected that she was trying to poison him.

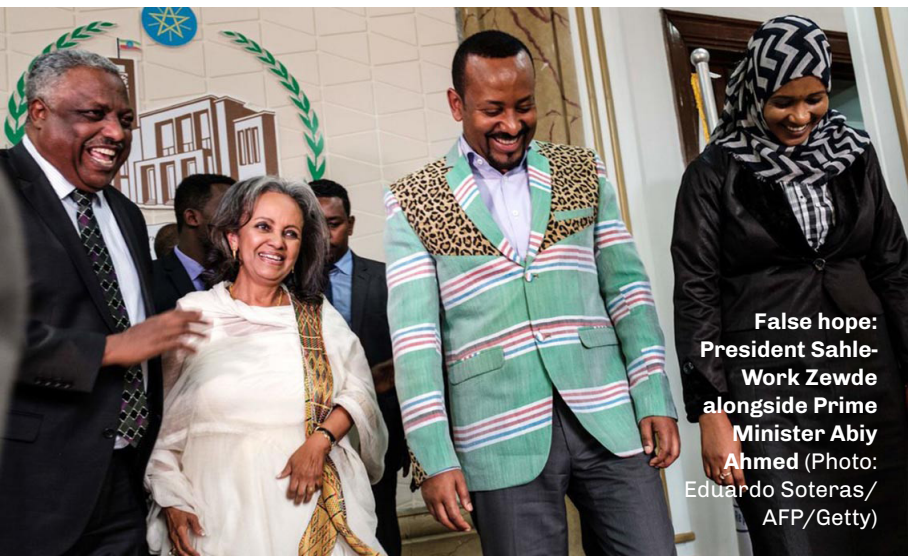
Zuma, who spied against the apartheid regime, was ousted as president of both the ANC and the country in 2017/2018 amid allegations of widespread corruption in his administration. He is due to testify before the commission next month. He has been reluctant to take the stand so far, pleading illness on several occasions, but he appears to have run out of excuses.

This week, the Constitutional Court ordered him to respect all summonses served by the commission and to answer all questions put to him.

"It is in the interest of all South Africans, the former president included, that these allegations be put to rest once and for all," the court said. ■



On the stand: Jacob Zuma will be grilled by the Zondo commission.
(Photo: Gulshan Khan/Getty)



False hope:
President Sahle-
Work Zewde
alongside Prime
Minister Abiy
Ahmed (Photo:
Eduardo Soteras/
AFP/Getty)

Dear Madam President: An open letter to Ethiopia's head of state

Ethiopia went to war against Tigray, one of its own provinces, in November last year. Although information about what exactly is going on remains scarce, the reports that have emerged from the region suggest that widespread atrocities have been committed against civilians. As always, women have been disproportionately affected. Last week, the United Nations issued a statement calling on the Ethiopian government “to protect all civilians from sexual and other violence”, noting that there have been a high number of reported rapes in Mekelle, Tigray’s capital city, as well as incidents of women being forced into sex in exchange for food by “military elements”.

Dear Madam President,
As a young woman living in Ethiopia, I, like many others, have witnessed and experienced acts of gender violence. Voiceless and broken, we’ve learnt to

sweep these crimes under the rug and move on with our lives, with no one to speak on our behalf.

Such is the norm in Ethiopia. So, you can imagine my excitement upon the

appointment of two women to two of the most prominent positions in the country. I was one of the millions of women who were overjoyed, hopeful and optimistic at the appointment of Meaza Ashenafi as president of the federal supreme court and the appointment of you, Sahel-Work Zewde, as the first female president of Ethiopia.

Change was here.

That was in 2018. Today it is January 2021. As I write this letter, I'm not the same excited and hopeful young woman you both once inspired. Today, I am a broken-hearted, numb 20-something-year-old living in fear, feeling ignored, unheard and completely forgotten by you and the world at large.

As I write this, it is day 77 of the war in Tigray. It also marks the 77th day that many of us Tigrayans living outside of Tigray haven't heard from our families and loved ones who lived in areas where telecommunication remains blocked, like the cities of Aksum and Adwa. Dead or alive, we have yet to find out.

The news we do hear is of women and girls being raped, starved and left without medical supplies. Innocent civilians, women, men and children alike have been killed. Millions displaced, thousands of families separated and millions more are knocking on the gates of death from hunger and disease.

I would give you the benefit of the doubt but there is an overwhelming amount of reporting; staggering evidence and eyewitness accounts which all show the dire conditions our people are in, and all to no avail. We've been made to feel

irrelevant by our own religious figures, artists, the state media, our leaders and the international community.

And you, Madam President, have turned your back on us. I had believed you to be different.

How many more girls and mothers must be raped, how many children must die? What will it take for you to be the voice of the voiceless? Their cries are loud, but your silence is louder.

We have been made to feel irrelevant by our own figures ... And you, Madam President, have turned your back on us. I had believed you to be different.

It hurts me to say that you've failed me and millions of your people who once supported and cheered you on. Speak up for us and our families. Don't hide behind ruthless men and their thirst for blood.

The optimist in me, however, still expects great things to happen even in the midst of turmoil. And so, I write this letter to call on you to speak up and stand up for humanity.

From,

Someone who still believes in miracles.



The identity of the author of this open letter has been withheld to prevent retribution. In Ethiopia's federal system of government, although the president is the official head of state, executive power rests with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

Lost and Found in São Paulo

Wilfred Okiche

Shine Your Eyes, helmed by Brazilian director Matias Mariani, contains many worlds. A co-production between Brazil and France, the film — which debuted at the Berlinale in 2020 — is the story of a Nigerian man, Amadi (a rock-solid OC Ukeje) in search of his elder brother, Ikenna (Chukwudi Iwuji) in the hectic, concrete jungle that is São Paulo.

As Amadi makes his way through the urban maze of Brazil's most populous city, he meets with characters — helpers and foils alike — who speak a variety of languages, from English to Igbo, Portuguese to Hungarian.

This multilingualism is deliberate as Mariani's film — his first big-screen effort — is an utterly original, if frenetic, study of human connection at its most primal.

Shine Your Eyes considers what happens when language — the most powerful of communication tools — is taken out of the equation. How do people reach beyond this challenge to grasp the emotions that unite in a world that increasingly leans towards individualism?

Amadi's quest continues a lifelong obsession with chasing his favoured

elder sibling, even when their mother's affections have made it clear that he could never live up to Ikenna.

Shine Your Eyes takes advantage of the complex but genuine relationship between the brothers to comment on the psychological responsibilities that Nigerian Igbo culture places on firstborn sons.

With awe-inspiring cinematography by Leo Bittencourt, the film's constricted 4:3 ratio introduces São Paulo in such a way that it becomes a visceral part of the narrative, second only to the mystery of locating Ikenna.

A film of interrupted ideas, *Shine Your Eyes* ultimately reveals that in learning to navigate the sprawling city and occupying space within it, Amadi's most important journey isn't his quest to locate his missing brother, but rather his own path towards self-discovery. ■



Shine Your Eyes is streaming on Netflix



Welcome to Casablanca

Ever expanding and lacking limitations, Casablanca is the definition of a thriving metropolis, writes [Amine El Amri](#)

Vibe check

Many travellers cannot disassociate Casablanca from the classic Hollywood movie, despite all its traffic and busyness. Perhaps it rings less exotic than Marrakech, Fez, Agadir or maybe even Tangier, but there is much more to Casablanca than meets the eye. The economic capital of the Kingdom is a world of its own, whether rich or poor. With its good and its bad, the city is undoubtedly alive.

With more than 6-million people sharing the identity of “Casawi”, diversity is a keyword. Every region of Morocco is represented.

Getting around town

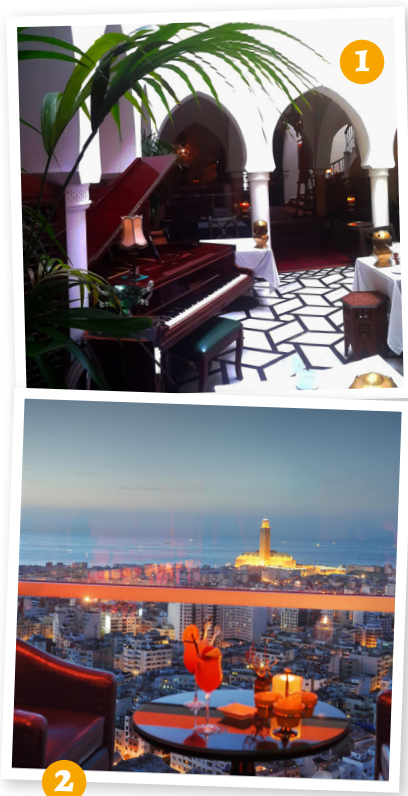
Traffic is certainly one the main issues facing any newcomer to Casablanca. But authorities sparked a public transportation revolution in the early 2010s. The old rusty buses have been replaced and new tramway lines have relieved the streets. Although the

tramway does not go everywhere in the city, it is the safest and cheapest way to get around the main points. Red cabs are a good option, with fares clearly displayed on the windshield – but they add a 50% cost to any fare starting after 9pm. Many of the drivers speak good French and will take you wherever you want. There is a train line between the airport and the famous Casa-Port station, also completely renewed a couple of years ago. There are also cars for rent almost everywhere so for a median price of €25-40, you could drive yourself. Parking is an issue of its own, though.

Restaurants and bars

You can't take *Casablanca* out of ... Casablanca. Firstly, let's get facts straight: *Casablanca* was not filmed in the homonymous city. But the legacy of the film survived through one particular place that could be perfect if someday a remake is produced: Le Rick's Café **(1)**. Facing the sea and boarded by the Old Medina ramparts, an old mansion has been restored to recreate the film's famous watering hole. Dramatic lighting, palm trees, a lively bar and international cuisine make it a perfect match both for nostalgic spirits and demanding patrons.

Casablanca is home to the finest international themed eateries in the country. And they won't hurt your pocket so much. Downtown, there is a large choice of pubs and bars,



some more sociable than others. Many open around 9 or 10pm and close around 2am. One of the most famous is Sky 28 **(2)** at the top of the highest tower in Casablanca, the Twin Center. It's the perfect place to watch the sunset and to have a panoramic view on the beating heart of Morocco. Nightlife is also very animated and is concentrated in the coastal suburb of Ain Diab. Nightclubs, shisha bars and restaurants are open through the night.

Tourist attractions

There is no doubt that the main attraction of Casablanca is the Hassan II Mosque. It is an astonishing 210m tall, and sits on the edge of the crushing Atlantic tides. It can be seen from almost everywhere in the city. At the top of the minaret, a laser shines ever eastward – the direction of Mecca, to which Muslim worshippers turn in their every prayer. The esplanade at its feet is a sanctuary for runners and children.

A couple of steps away from the Old Medina is the Bab Marrakech market, which is well known for its handcrafted jewels. The Mohammed V square is also famous for its pigeon colony at the heart of the city and is surrounded with Art-Deco buildings that go back to the early years of the 20th century.



If you want to go authentic, visit Al Habous neighborhood **(3)**. It's located right beside the Royal Palace, and is where historical tailors still do business. This is the place to get an authentic souvenir. And it's not like the noisy, busy commercial streets. It's more like an open-air museum where the immaterial experience is far more important.

Best time of the year

As a Mediterranean country, Morocco has a soft climate. And it's even better in Casablanca, where the winter might be cold, but the summer is moderate. Come during spring, especially between May and June. In this period, the city usually opens up the historical sites for the *Journées du Patrimoine* (Patrimony days) that allow everybody to get a guided visit of sites such as the old Court and the Mohammed V Boulevard.

What song best represents the feel of the city?

Casablanca by Low Deep T. The rhythmic, groovy voice of the South African artist and the beat represents exactly what Casablanca is about. The song was a hit when it came out in late 2012 and it still amazes me every time I listen to it. I think many Casawis feel the same. ■



Do you want to show us around your town or city?

Send an email to thecontinent@mg.co.za and we'll be in touch!



(Photo: Naveen Sharma/SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)

The farmers who held Delhi hostage

This may be the largest protest movement in human history

EDITOR'S NOTE: WHY WE COMMISSIONED THIS STORY

The farmers' protests in India are significant not just because an estimated 250-million people have participated – although that makes them impossible to ignore. But they also illustrate fault lines that are all too familiar to us on the African continent. The rural-urban divide. The centre against the periphery. The way that the careless decisions of wealthy elites in capital cities impact everyone else's lives. India's current upheaval is what happens when these fault lines begin to break apart.

Leon Lidigu

The Red Fort is Delhi's most famous landmark, and has for centuries been an imposing symbol of the capital city's

authority. Whenever someone wants to seize power in India, they must first seize the Red Fort.

A Persian shah plundered it in 1739. The Marathas took it back in 1761. A



Intractable: Hundreds of thousands of farmers are camped on the outskirts of Delhi and blockading highways into the capital (Photo: Aandito Mukherjee/Getty Images)

Sikh army conquered it in 1783. The British colonised it in 1803, only handing control to a democratically-elected Indian government in 1947, when Jawaharlal Nehru raised India's tricolour flag above the fort's iconic Lahore Gate.

On Tuesday, India's 72nd Republic Day, the fort was stormed once again – this time by tens of thousands of peasant farmers, who hoisted their own yellow flag alongside the national banner.

The farmers are part of what has been described as the largest protest movement in history. An estimated 250-million Indians across the country are thought to support their calls to repeal controversial new agricultural laws, and have participated in strike action. Hundreds of thousands of protesters marched to the outskirts of New Delhi in November, and have been camped there ever since, vowing not to move until their demands are met. They have even established their own makeshift cities, complete with water and electricity supplies; many are sleeping

in their tractors.

But Tuesday was the first time they entered the city proper, engaging in running battles with police in the streets. Tear gas further polluted the city's infamously dirty air, and some farmers drove their tractors at breakneck speeds along the city's usually jammed streets (at least one protester, 30-year-old Navreet Singh, was killed when a tractor overturned).

Tear gas polluted the city's infamously dirty air, and some farmers drove their tractors at breakneck speeds along the city's streets

The crowds were simply too large for the police to contain, and they surged past the barriers and into the Red Fort itself. It is notable that police did not use live ammunition on the protesters.

According to police reports, eight commuter buses were damaged, more than 300 barricades broken, four containers were destroyed and 17 public vehicles were either vandalised or destroyed by protesters. Delhi Police said that 300 officers had been injured in the unrest.

An agricultural revolution

The anger at the government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi stems from several new laws, hurriedly passed in September, which fundamentally change how India's agricultural sector works. The most significant change is that the state will no longer guarantee prices for essential crops, leaving farmers at the mercy of a fluctuating and unpredictable market.

The government says the reforms are essential in order to modernise farming in India, but the farmers say the new laws risk destroying not just their livelihoods but their entire way of life.

It didn't help that the laws were passed suddenly, taking most farmers completely by surprise. Sudden, dramatic changes appear to be Modi's modus operandi: his 2016 decision to demonetise the Indian rupee (removing large banknotes from circulation) was similarly disruptive, as was the unilateral abrogation of Kashmir's special status (the northern state was previously semi-autonomous).

Despite this, Modi has retained the respect of many of the farmers. Speaking to *The Continent*, several said that he is a strong leader and has to make tough decisions – even though they disagree

with this particular decision.

The ruling party has been at pains to separate the protesters who stormed the Red Fort from the broader farmers protest movement. “The people we had calling themselves farmers all these days turned out to be extremists. Don't insult farmers, refer to extremists as extremists,” said Sambit Patra, a spokesperson for the Bharatiya Janata Party.

There has also been disagreement between the farmers themselves about whether the violence was necessary or legitimate. Some unions blamed “outside elements” for triggering Tuesday's unrest.

Under siege

The occupation of the Red Fort did not last long. By the afternoon, the farmers had been forced out, with the government deploying soldiers and paramilitary troops to regain control. More than 200 farmers have been arrested.

But New Delhi remains surrounded, and the situation volatile. On Friday, a police officer was stabbed as a group of protesting farmers clashed with residents of Singhu, on the outskirts of Delhi.

Efforts to find a mediated resolution have so far been fruitless. There have been 11 rounds of negotiations, all of which have ended in stalemate. So far, the government has refused to countenance repealing the new laws, although they have offered to suspend them for 18 months. This offer was rejected by unions.

The talks, it seems, are going nowhere – and neither are the farmers. ■

Leon Lidigu is a Kenyan journalist who has lived and worked in India for five years.

PHOTO ESSAY

We are humans too.

Uganda is a dangerous place to be gay. Or lesbian. Or bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex. Same-sex unions are forbidden by law – a law that is regularly enforced – and offences such as “aggravated homosexuality” can earn perpetrators life in prison. Homophobia is widespread.

Many of Uganda's LGBTQIA+ community have been victims of assault, social injustice and discrimination. Some have been abandoned by their families, and struggle to survive economically. It can be difficult to access health services. The fear of violence never goes away.

Governments are supposed to represent their people, but Uganda's politicians – and it's not just the ruling party – have repeatedly sought to deny basic human rights to their LGBTQIA+ population.

Documentary photographer **Stuart Tibaweswa** sought to document some of these experiences. He flipped the script. We know what homophobic leaders think of the queer community. But what does the queer community think of those leaders, and their government?



‘Politics is one of the reasons why we don’t have peace. The people in the political game should start seeing us from a more human perspective and realise that they are only spreading hate. We are not asking to be treated in any special way, we just want equality for all. I want to feel special and proud of my country.’

– Davina Lorinda (Queer)

“...it’s sad that with all the qualifications I have, it is hard to find a leadership opportunity. Once you stand out and people see you are different ... it will cease to be [about] politics but rather shaming you, and I’m not ready for that.”



“ All my life has been about fighting for space and just to be heard. As a leader at Transgender Equality Uganda, we are always clamouring for people in political spheres to listen to us, and give us opportunities to express ourselves, but that never cultivates hope. It’s just word and word. I love leadership because it satisfies me, but it’s sad that with all the qualifications I have, it is hard to get this opportunity. Once you stand out and people see you are different from their usual gender identities, it will cease to be politics but rather shaming you, and I’m not ready for that.” – **Mondisa Akintole** (Transwoman)



“People in power need to know that we are human. If they want to implement any policy regarding our community, they need to get to the grassroots, do research about us, and understand us as more than just a minority.”

“ The political space right now is really tense, and I do not really want to be part of it. I am eligible to vote, but I don't think I will be voting because I do not feel like anyone is worth my vote. If someone like Frank Mugisha [a renowned Ugandan LGBTQIA+ activist] said he were contesting anything, I would go out and even rally for him, because these are the people that have walked in our shoes and know what it means to be marginalised, so they would definitely carry on our message. People in power need to know that we are human. If they want to implement any policy regarding our community, they need to get to the grassroots, do research about us, and understand us [as] more than just a minority.”

– **Watson Samuel** (Queer)

“Policies are there: they just need to be enforced and implemented. If we talk of equality, freedom of speech and expression, plus access to medical care for all Ugandans, why can’t this apply to us, the LGBT, as well! Are we not Ugandans? Are we not human beings?”

– Vinka Silk (Transwoman)



“ I was in the bar some time with my colleagues when the police arrested us like thieves, claiming that we were impersonating and dressed like women to scam people. The accusations were terrible : they went ahead to call the media to record to us and put us on the news. It was an embarrassing situation; one of my friends’ parents disowned them after watching it.”

– Keith Mayanja (Transwoman)

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.

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

"My favourite beer
is Equatorial
Guinness."

- Who infamously said: "The problem of Africa in general and Uganda in particular is not the people but leaders who want to overstay in power?"
- What was the name of the song jazz musician Jonas Gwangwa performed at the Annual Academy Awards in 1988?
- Which country shares its name with its own currency, which translates into English as "Lion"?
- What animal, found only in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is striped like a zebra but related to the giraffe?
- In what year was the Ethiopian Navy disestablished: 1966 or 1996?
- True or false: In 1994 Kenya established the Devil Worship Commission?
- In which AU country does most of the population speak Spanish?
- What is the capital of Nigeria?
- South African pianist Abdullah Ibrahim was known by a different name earlier in his career. What was it?
- Name the drummer who played with Fela Kuti for many years who passed away last year.
- What does the name Burkina Faso mean?
- What is the southernmost point of the African continent?



Bill Gates, Big Pharma and entrenching the vaccine apartheid

Waiving intellectual property restrictions on Covid-19 vaccines could help the developing world. But India and South Africa's entreaties are falling on deaf ears

Simon Allison

In October 2020, diplomats from South Africa and India approached the World Trade Organisation (WTO) with a revolutionary proposal.

Together, the two countries argued that countries should be allowed to ignore any patents related to Covid-19 vaccines for the duration of the pandemic. In other words: everyone should be allowed to manufacture the vaccine, without penalty.

In their official communication, the countries said: "As new diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for Covid-19 are developed, there are significant concerns [about] how these will be made



Antivirus: Bill Gates receives his first dose of the Moderna vaccine.

(Photo: Bill Gates/Twitter)

available promptly, in sufficient quantities and at affordable prices to meet global demand."

Just a few weeks later, Pfizer and BioNTech announced the first successful phase three trials for a Covid-19 vaccine, followed swiftly by Moderna and AstraZeneca.

In developing countries, jubilation at the prospect of a swift end to the devastating pandemic turned quickly into fear and anger, as it became clear that vaccines would only be made available to the rich, with little thought to equitable distribution. Canada, the worst offender, has pre-ordered so many vaccines that it will be able to vaccinate each of its citizens

six times over. In the UK and US, it is four vaccines per person; and two each in the EU and Australia.

The vaccines that have been made available to the developing world are either untested — such as the Chinese and Russian vaccines, for which insufficient clinical trial data has been released — or expensive. South Africa has ordered 1.5-million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, but will pay more than double what the EU is paying per dose.

The EU says that it is entitled to a lower price because it invested in the vaccine's development — nevermind that the AstraZeneca vaccine was literally tested on the bodies of South Africans who volunteered to be part of the clinical trial in Johannesburg.

The EU says that it is entitled to a lower price because it invested in the vaccine's development, even though AstraZeneca was literally tested on the bodies of South African volunteers

In lower income countries, the situation is even worse. As of 18 January, 39-million vaccine doses had been administered in the world's 50 richest countries, compared to just 25 individual doses in low-income countries.

It appears that South Africa and India were right. Under the current rules, the vaccine cannot be made quickly or

cheaply enough to meet global demand, which means vaccines are only going to those countries that can afford it. This is a “catastrophic moral failure”, said the head of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Some activists have described the situation as a “vaccine apartheid”.

Nonetheless, the proposal for a patent waiver has been repeatedly rejected at the WTO by wealthier countries including the European Union, the United Kingdom, US and Switzerland; countries which, as Reuters wryly noted, are “all home to major pharmaceutical companies”. They also all enjoy early access to the vaccine.

Nor has South Africa and India's proposal received support from the most influential non-state actor in global public health: Bill Gates.

The pandemic has been good to Gates. In 2020, the Microsoft cofounder added \$18-billion to his fortune, which now stands at a cool \$131-billion (the annual GDP of Ethiopia, a country of 112-million people, is \$96-billion). He is the fourth-richest person in the world.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has since its inception in 2000 spent more than \$54-billion combating diseases such as polio and malaria and bolstering the health systems of developing countries. It funds everything from governments to civil society organisations to health journalism outlets, which means it has an enormous say in how health policy is shaped and communicated. It also contributes 12% of the WHO's total budget.

But despite Gates' stated commitment

to an equitable distribution of the Covid vaccine, he is refusing to back South Africa and India's calls for a waiver on patents.

This should not come as a surprise: the Gates Foundation has historically been opposed to efforts to reform intellectual property protections for pharmaceutical companies — putting it at odds with other public health NGOs such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF) — and has in fact lobbied for developing countries to impose even stronger protections for drug companies' patents. This is perhaps because Gates' own fortune is built on intellectual property, specifically the copyrights and patents associated with Windows and Microsoft.

In response to a question from *The Continent*, Gates argued that lifting patents would not make any real difference. "At this point, changing the rules wouldn't make any additional vaccines available." That's because, he claims, there are only a handful of manufacturers in the world with the necessary capacity to make the vaccines, and these are all at capacity already.

This claim is only partially true, as MSF vaccine pharmacist Alain Alsalhani told *The Continent*. Highly specialised manufacturers are needed to make traditional vaccines, such as the AstraZeneca jab, because this involves isolating and replicating parts of the virus itself.

Only 43 companies are on the WHO's approved list of vaccine manufacturers, and it could take years to set up new factories that meet the regulations.

But the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are based on manipulating messenger RNA (mRNA), which appears to be significantly easier to manufacture. Moderna's vaccines are being produced by Lonza, a Swiss chemicals company with no previous experience of vaccine manufacture. This suggests that the pool of companies that could make the vaccine is much higher, with potentially 10 000 capable companies in India alone.

Despite Gate's stated commitment to equitable distribution, he is refusing to back South Africa and India's calls for a waiver

"If this assumption is verified, and we hope we will have more detailed analysis [soon], then we are changing the story here," said Alsalhani.

Even then, Alsalhani warns that waiving patent protections is no miracle fix, because the technical challenges are still considerable — especially if the big pharmaceutical companies are unwilling to share their processes. Moderna, for example, has said it will not enforce its patent rights; but Lonza, which actually makes the vaccine, "won't talk to us" about how it's actually done, he said.

South Africa and India are continuing their fight at the WTO. But with the world's most powerful countries ranged against them, and without the support of Bill Gates — the single most influential unelected individual in public health — the chances of success are as slim. ■

Africa's economies can recover. This is how.

Chido Munyati

The Covid-19 pandemic is driving sub-Saharan Africa into its first recession in 25 years, putting economic progress at risk. Recovery will depend on how effective governments and private sector partners are at addressing four key priorities.

Implementing the AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which came into effect on 1 January, can serve as a framework for the region's economic recovery. The zone aims to connect 1.3-billion people across 55 countries with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) valued at \$3.4-trillion.

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It is estimated that the AfCFTA will increase the volume of intra-African trade by more than 81% by 2035, creating new

opportunities for African manufacturers and workers. The World Economic Forum's Regional Action Group for Africa, in collaboration with Deloitte, recently published a report that addresses how governments and the private sector can leverage this opportunity by building effective regional value chains.

Implementing the AfCFTA, which will require the cooperation and coordination of public and private stakeholders, will help usher in the kinds of reforms necessary to enhance long-term growth, reduce poverty and broaden economic inclusion.

According to the World Bank, most of the AfCFTA's income gains are likely to come from trade-facilitation measures that reduce red tape and simplify customs procedures. The Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, a public-private partnership led by the forum, is working on the ground with governments and the private sector to deliver projects that will help implement the trade facilitation agreement. The alliance has projects in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Malawi and Zambia.

Addressing macroeconomic vulnerabilities

The pandemic has exposed



Virtual reality: Davos was empty this year, so the World Economic Forum moved online

macroeconomic vulnerabilities across the region, and most countries will probably emerge from the crisis with large budget deficits. Already the risk of debt default has started to materialise in the region, with Zambia recording Africa's first sovereign default since the start of the pandemic.

The pandemic has exposed macroeconomic vulnerabilities

In May last year, G20 countries established the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI).

In all, 37 Africa countries are eligible for a temporary suspension of debt-service payments owed to their official bilateral creditors.

But, as of December, only 28 African countries were participating in the initiative because of the fear that any

suspension of interest payments may trigger sovereign ratings downgrades and restrict future access to private creditors. In response, the G20 and regional governments have called on private creditors to participate in the initiative on comparable terms.

To be sure, the prospects for the region's sustained recovery are limited without external financing. Accordingly, members of the forum's Regional Action Group for Africa have proposed new financing models including asset recycling, the creation of a special purpose vehicle modelled on the repurchase "repo" facilities commonly used by central banks, blended finance approaches and principles for dealing with African debt discussions.

Harnessing digital change

The pandemic has been a catalyst for the acceleration of digital transformation

across the region. The digital economy offers opportunities for increased productivity, entrepreneurship, innovation and job creation.

It is estimated that the internet economy has the potential to contribute \$180-billion to Africa's economy by 2025, accounting for 5.2% of the continent's GDP.

But the scale and speed of progress is being impeded by digital infrastructure gaps and digital skills. The region continues to have the most expensive internet and would need to spend \$100-billion by 2030 to achieve universal broadband access.

With Africa particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the recovery should be driven in the context of a just transition to net-zero carbon emissions

The forum's affiliate centres for the Centres for the Fourth Industrial Revolution — in Africa these are in South Africa and Rwanda — will play a critical role in helping shape the development and application of emerging technologies for the benefit of the region.

Africa needs a workforce equipped with the digital skills to harness the opportunities of the digital transformation.

This is critical because, as the world's youngest region, Africa will have almost

one fifth of the global labour force — and nearly one third of the global youth labour force by 2030.

The forum and the South African government have partnered on a Closing the Skills Gap Accelerator that aims to address skills gaps and reshape education and training for the future.

A just transition to zero emissions

Finally, with Africa particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, the recovery should be driven in the context of a just transition to net-zero carbon emissions.

To this end, the African Circular Economy Alliance is collaborating with Regional Action Group on Africa and the Africa Plastics Recycling Alliance — a coalition that includes The Coca-Cola Company, Diageo, Unilever and Nestlé — on building a PET (polyethylene terephthalate) plastic bottle-to-bottle recycling industry on the continent and establishing a common regional standard for recycled PET.

Given the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 crisis, Africa faces a difficult and unpredictable road to recovery, and there will be a wide range of policy challenges to address.

But, by prioritising these four actions, governments and businesses can come together to ensure an inclusive, cohesive and sustainable recovery that benefits Africa and the world. ■

Chido Munyati is acting head of Africa at the World Economic Forum.



Injection of hope: A South African volunteer receives the AstraZeneca vaccine during the clinical trials last year (Siphiwe Sibeko/AFP)

Promising results from first vaccines tested against Covid-19 variant discovered in South Africa

Laura López González

Covid-19 vaccines made by pharmaceutical firms Novavax and Johnson & Johnson (J&J) have been shown to reduce the risk of moderate to severe Covid-19 by about 60% in people infected with the new variant, the companies announced this week.

Preliminary data from a late-stage clinical trial shows that J&J's one-dose jab reduced the risk of moderate to serious Covid-19 by about 57% in South African participants.

Novavax reduced this risk by 60% in

HIV-negative people, which made up the majority of people in the study. But in a small group of people living with HIV in the Novavax phase study, the jab did not work as well — bringing the vaccine's overall efficacy down to 49.4%.

Still, Shabir Madhi — the lead researcher on the South African Novavax trial and executive director of the Vaccines and Infectious Diseases Analytics Research Unit (VIDA) at Wits University in Johannesburg — is cautious about interpreting the findings from such a small sample of people living with HIV.

Because the number of HIV-positive

people included in the study was so small, Madhi explained, even a single case of Covid-19 in this group would statistically affect how well the jab would be shown to work.

“I think we should just avoid reading anything into the results among HIV-positive people,” Madhi warned. “[Those results] were among 240 individuals and [in a sample so small] even one case in either direction can [change] that efficacy estimate.”

J&J's one-shot wonder

The firms' announcements, issued through press releases, came less than 24 hours apart. The findings have not yet been peer-reviewed.

Although both vaccines performed more poorly against the Covid-19 variant originally discovered in South Africa than in other variants, both vaccines show promise in reducing the risk of deadly Covid-19 cases from the variant, researchers say.

Interim analysis from J&J's late-stage vaccine trial showed it to be 85% effective in preventing severe disease regardless of which Covid-19 variant was behind the infection. In a press release, the firm also said the one-dose jab provided complete protection against Covid-19 hospitalisations or deaths during the first month after people received the jab.

“A one-shot vaccine is considered by the World Health Organisation to be the best option in pandemic settings,” said Paul Stoffels, J&J's chief scientific officer, in a statement.

“[An] 85% efficacy in preventing

severe Covid-19 disease and ... [death] will potentially protect hundreds of millions of people.”

He continued: “It also offers the hope of helping ease the huge burden placed on healthcare systems and communities.”

We're seeing a trend

The earlier-phase trial of Novovax's two-dose jab was not designed to measure how well it protected against hospitalisations considering its smaller size and younger sample, Madhi explained. Still, he said he believed the inoculation would ultimately reduce hospitalisations.

“The trend we're seeing with all of the vaccines that have reported results and shown efficacy have shown higher efficacy for more severe disease,” Madhi told *The Continent*. “I believe this vaccine will have an impact on hospitalisation and will have an impact on [reducing] severe disease by probably [more] than 60%.”

J&J will continue to check up on participants in its trial for another two years, and the firm says data on the vaccine may therefore be updated. Those in the Novovax trial will also receive follow-up checks, and the firm has already embarked on an important late-stage clinical trial to provide additional data on how well the vaccine works.

J&J's vaccine is currently under review for regulatory approval in South Africa, which would be the first step in allowing the vaccine to be used in the country. J&J vaccines will also form part of the roughly 670-million Covid-19 vaccine doses secured for the continent by the African Union. ■



The Big Picture

Class cancelled: Kenya's government closed public schools in March last year to curb the spread of Covid-19. Earlier this month, learners returned for the official reopening day. But some learners in the lake city of Kisumu faced another obstacle, as Lake Victoria burst its banks and flooded classrooms.

(Photo: Brian Ongoro/AFP)

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